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After the War Was Over

by [Quill_lumos](#)

Summary

After the last battle, Harry is lost and the wizarding world is a mess, so many relationships have changed and so many more have been shattered...

Notes

Note from SeparatriX, the archivist: this story was originally archived at [HP Fandom](#), which was closed for health and financial reasons. To preserve the archive, I began manually importing its works to the AO3 as an Open Doors-approved project in August 2016. I e-mailed all creators about the move and posted announcements, but may not have reached everyone. If you are (or know) this creator, please contact me using the e-mail address on [HP Fandom collection profile](#).

Part One

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter, nor any of the characters from the books or movies. I do not make any money from the writing of this story.

A/N This story is unbetaed

This is an old story of mine. In fact it is the first one that I ever wrote so I thought I would give it a tidy up and repost it.

It does contain mistakes I know, if you spot any, please feel free to comment. Some comments were deleted when I deleted chapters - sorry about that! ~ Lucie

PART ONE - FINDING WHAT WAS LOST

Hermione did not know how long she had sat on the old stone bench. Time seemed to pass differently when she was here with Harry. Well, with him in the only way that she could be these days. Harry had been lost after the final battle. Three days before his seventeenth birthday he had done what he had been foretold to do from the day he had been marked as Voldemort's equal and rid the world of one of the most evil wizards who had ever lived. The wizarding world had exploded in celebration, parties had gone on for days, but Hermione could not celebrate. Not with Harry missing.

For a long, long time she had hoped that he had survived and had kept thinking that she saw him in the distance or in crowds, she had tried not to give up hope. But now, twelve years later on the anniversary of his great victory Hermione could not help but think that Harry had indeed died. Had gone forever and that she would never see him again in this world at least.

Once a year she came and sat by the stone statue that had been raised in this corner in honour of the child hero and spend some time with the nearest thing she could get to represent her lost friend. Later on there would be parties, celebrations and speeches.

But not here.

Hogwarts was closed for the summer holidays and there were just a few teachers in residence at the moment. Some, like she, had a number of things to do before term began and liked to have those things sorted out before they took a break. Some had already gone away and would rush back the week before term started, struggling to get everything ready before the old building swarmed with children once again and others like the shadowy figure standing in the semi-darkness of the nearby copper beech tree had nowhere else to go.

She had been covertly watching the intruder on her memories for several minutes to see if he would come forward but he seemed unaware that she could see him. He always kept to the shadows these days, the bright, white-blonde hair that was his curse dimmed by the perpetual semi-darkness he inhabited. The sparkle of life, that had once made his grey eyes dance with malevolence, put out for evermore.

He was a mere cipher of the spiteful boy she had known as a child, left with nothing by the ministry and escaping Azkaban only because so many on the side of light had spoken up for him. The deciding factor of his freedom being the scrawled note written by Harry himself before he disappeared. Draco Malfoy had stood out all too clearly after the war was over. The child of

Death Eaters himself and marked with evil, Malfoy was easily identified, easily targeted and easy to hate.

It had been several years before he had finally returned to the sanctuary that Hogwarts offered, dragged there by Ron Weasley of all people, and irony of ironies he now did the job that had once been Hagrid's, the mighty Malfoy heir reduced to Keeper of Keys.

“Draco!” she called, watching as the figure stiffened, shocked at being caught staring at Harry’s image. He started to back away but Hermione was too fast for him. The grace and speed that he had demonstrated as a teenager was long gone. This Malfoy shuffled and stumbled broken down by one too many injuries and one too many words of hate. She rushed towards him before he could turn to try to run and grabbed his wrist, gently pulling him into the morning sunlight.

“Come on,” She said softly “there is room here for you.” she manoeuvred him over to the bench and gently tugged at his arm until he sat down beside her. At first he kept his eyes lowered, his body stiff. But gradually, once he realised that Hermione was not about to say anything, the tension in his back and shoulders eased somewhat and his gaze tentatively rose to rest on Harry’s face.

This was the best of all the statues that had been created in Harry’s honour, at least that was Hermione’s opinion. So many of them seemed to convey nothing of the real Harry, portraying a clichéd hero figure that was so far from the boy Hermione remembered as to be almost funny. But this statue had been made by Dean Thomas and demonstrated all the skill that that young man continued to display, this was the work of a true artist and someone who had known and cared for Harry as a friend.

This Harry portrayed the sweetness and uncertainty that had characterised the 16 year-old. He was Wart, not Arthur. If he had lived Harry would undoubtedly have become the greatest wizard of his generation. Indeed considering the amount of raw power that he had demonstrated at the final battle Harry would probably have become the greatest wizard of several generations.

But Harry’s magic was lost when Harry was and there was nothing that she or anyone could do to change that, and all that potential, all the goodness, the empathy and love that were amongst Harry’s most notable strengths, they were lost too. Had Harry survived the world would have been a better place Hermione believed. He would not have allowed the wizarding world to tear itself apart as it had. The mistrust and hatred against Slytherins and pure-blooded families that was characteristic of those early years would have been tempered by the forgiveness that Harry embodied, and Scrimgeour would not have been given free reign to run roughshod through age old traditions, destroy families and turn away “dark creatures” in the way that he had.

Hermione hurriedly stifled the sob that threatened to escape and found her hand gently grasped by Draco. She turned to him through a haze of tears but he had not looked away from Harry so she studied his profile for a while before returning her regard to Harry’s granite features. She gently squeezed the comforting hand that held hers and returned to her memories, whilst all around them the day grew steadily warmer and the noises of the awakening castle came to them muffled on the summer breeze.

Severus Snape was surveying the castle grounds from his sitting-room window when Hermione and Draco returned to the castle. He watched them for some time as they walked across the grass, not speaking yet united in their sadness. He was glad that Draco had returned to Hogwarts at last, maybe now the young man could finally find peace?

He thought back to the night that Ron had bundled a bruised and battered Malfoy into Minerva’s

office. They hadn't known who it was at first in Ron's arms, cradled like a child but Ron had deposited him gently onto the sofa that was placed for warmth in front of the large fireplace and the hood that covered him had fallen away revealing the distinctive hair and a myriad of bruises. Severus and Minerva had been enjoying a last cup of tea before bed when the youngest Weasley male had come crashing up the spiral staircase. Ron had grown into an enormous young man, with huge hands and feet and yet he handled Malfoy with surprising tenderness, making sure that he was comfortable before turning to address the headmistress and her oldest friend.

"I found him in Knockturn Alley," he'd said, "Some bastard has given him a right kicking. Why the fuck can't they leave him alone? Hasn't he suffered enough?"

Snape had been stunned by Ron's comments, not that he didn't agree with them, because he could hardly have put it better himself, but because it was Ron saying these words. Ron had hated Malfoy at school. Ron whom he had always underestimated – whom most people underestimated come to that, had surprised him again.

There were lots of things that had happened the day of the final battle that Severus had never really known about and the bond of friendship that later formed between Ron and Draco had been nurtured then. Just before Riddle Manor exploded in a shower of masonry and blinding light Draco had appeared from nowhere in Ron's arms. He had been naked and bleeding and Ron had apparently heard Harry's voice in his head asking him to look after Malfoy. He had tried he'd said, but Malfoy, imbued with his family's stupid pride, had refused. After spending six months in the Ministry's holding cells Malfoy had vanished into the Muggle world and the edges of the dark-side of the wizarding one. However he did not disappear before searing Ron with a diatribe of scathing comments about his family's poverty and his own ineptness. Weasley though had never given up searching for his erstwhile enemy and had sworn to someday bring him home.

Draco had retreated from the wizarding world like a wounded animal when he had found nothing but contempt and scorn poured upon him from all those who had willingly kowtowed to his father. The Muggles he'd encountered had found the sadly diminished and very naive Draco easy prey indeed. Not allowed to have a wand for several years he had been little better than a squib so he had cultivated a taste for Muggle drugs - Severus shivered at the very thought and had been selling his arse in Knockturn when Ron had found him. If only Severus had not had to spend nearly two years in Azkaban before Minerva was able to get him released, he would have taken Draco in but by the time Severus was out of prison Draco had disappeared into the dark underbelly of Muggle London.

Of course the fact that Severus had been freed at all was in the end also down to Harry. Even the testimony of the majority of the Order of the Phoenix, Albus' pensieve plea and the absence of the Dark Mark on his forearm had not swayed the Wizengamot in the favour of the man who had killed Dumbledore. It was only when Hermione discovered that the tattered scroll penned by a weakened Harry when Voldemort imprisoned him had actually been written in his own blood and was therefore a document which they were legally and magically bound to accept, that Severus had finally been given his freedom, a begrudging apology and his surprisingly unbroken wand.

How Harry had come to write the document no one knew. But it seemed that he had somehow, wandlessly, managed to transfigure some of his ragged clothing into parchment and quill and written passionately about how Dumbledore had begged Severus to kill him as he had been dying in agony from the poison he had ingested earlier that evening. Harry had been the only witness to Albus' final hours and therefore his testimony was irrefutable.

Not only that, but Harry had indeed turned out to be the Chosen One and nobody, not even Scrimgeour was going to argue with the last words of the Saviour of the Wizarding World.

Severus suspected that Harry had been unable to transfigure any ink as his guards were by then

denying him water and had used the only liquid available to him at the time to proclaim the innocence of both Severus and Draco. It chilled him to the bone to think of what must have gone through Harry's mind to make him write those letters. All on his own by then, in pain and probably convinced that he would not live much longer he had decided to try and save the two people who had caused him as much grief as they possibly could in his all too short life. His bitter relationship with Harry Potter was in fact Severus' greatest regret in a life that was full of regrets.

Harry had been missing from his Muggle home for several hours before anyone knew he had gone. He had been supposedly safe there, but leaving Harry with his Muggle relatives had they discovered been Dumbledore's supreme folly. Snape had found himself summoned to Hogwarts by Fawkes on the day that Harry had disappeared. Thinking he would never return there again he had been astonished when the Phoenix had arrived at his house at Spinner's End.

Albus had left messages in his pensieve for Minerva and for Harry, explaining everything, Harry of course had never seen his message, or Albus' heartfelt apology for all the boy had had to go through. Severus remembered with shame how he had scoffed when Albus had expressed his regrets for how Harry had had to grow up.

He thought about the chaos that had ensued upon his arrival, The Order had been gathered in Minerva's office arguing over what Snape had done and what was to happen next when three terrified, blood covered Muggles had suddenly appeared in their midst. They turned out to be Harry's aunt and uncle and his grossly overweight cousin Dudley. Slowly over the course of the next few hours The Order discovered that Harry's uncle had sold Harry to some men he had met in a pub. The men were Death Eaters and they had discovered Harry's address somehow.

Unable to enter the wards they had hung about to see what they could find out and had overheard Vernon Dursley bemoaning the return of his "criminal" nephew they had swiftly engaged the man in conversation and offered a fee of £1,000 to "take Harry off his hands" for the summer. When Harry had returned from Kings Cross he had found four Death Eaters sitting in his Aunt Petunia's lounge, sipping coffee. Taken by surprise he had been easily over powered and snatched away.

What seemed to outrage Harry's uncle more than anything was the fact that the Death Eaters had then decided to take the Dursleys with them too, presumably to have some fun torturing them and maybe using them as leverage against Harry? Though why Harry should care what happened to his appalling relatives after such a betrayal was beyond Snape.

Apparently he did, however. Because here they were, standing in the headmistress's office a little bit beaten up but otherwise unharmed. How they had got there through the supposedly impenetrable wards of Hogwarts no one had ever discovered. But, considering subsequent events, Harry surely must have had something to do with such powerful magic.

Harry's obese cousin seemed the only one amongst them who had any remorse or understanding about what they had done as he was spluttering and wailing. Crying for Harry, begging the order to rescue his cousin from the evil "dementoids" and the men in cloaks and masks. He kept pleading for forgiveness for all he had done to Harry over the years and at that stage it was perhaps only his apologies which had prevented The Order from killing the Dursleys there and then.

Molly Weasley had been sobbing loudly, telling Petunia Dursley that she deserved to be whipped. Mad Eye Moody had had to be held back by Bill Weasley and Kingsley Shacklebolt as he was threatening to rip Dursley senior's head from his shoulders, although Severus suspected that neither Bill or Kingsley were planning on trying too hard to restrain the grief stricken auror. Arthur Weasley was pale and shaking, muttering, "sold for fifty galleons," under his breath over

and over again. The twins were loudly threatening to embark on a reign of terror against Mugglekind and Tonks sat in a corner rocking a stunned Remus in her arms with tears streaming down her cheeks.

But Minerva had been magnificent. She had always had a secret fondness for Harry but scrupulously fair to her Gryffindors as she was, she had tried to hide her feelings for Lily and James' child. Now, however, she was like a lioness with a threatened cub. "Do you know what you have done?" She roared at a trio of stunned Dursleys.

"You have condemned the world to darkness. Once we are gone, the last bastion of the light, do you really think that Voldemort will leave your world in peace? He wants to destroy Muggles! We are all that has kept you safe, and our one hope of defeating him was Harry. You have destroyed our hope. "You have destroyed our world and your world and you have condemned an innocent child to torture and death.

"How could you?

"How could you do that to a child? Such a sweet and special child? You have sold us all into slavery for a handful of galleons. You are beyond evil! You disgust me!

"Hagrid!" She bawled at the gentle giant who sat sobbing in the corner, "Get them out of my sight!"

The stunned silence that followed her outburst lasted for several seconds and despite all that happened subsequently Severus remembered those long anguished moments as the lowest time of the war. The time that everyone feared that Harry was dead, Voldemort unopposed and the whole world teetering on the edge of an endless dark age. He never discovered what happened to the Dursleys immediately afterwards but he hoped that what ever it was had been difficult and uncomfortable, later they were tried as child abusers and supporters of Voldemort and sentenced to Muggle prison for the rest of their lives.

Only Dudley escaped their fate, his memory modified, he moved in with Arabella Figg the one person who would consent to help him.

Severus remembered that just as he thought to break the silence with a question about what the hell they were going to do next, his Dark Mark had started to burn and he had rushed out of the office, heading for the nearest apparition site, hoping and praying that Harry was still alive and promising The Order to report back as soon as he could. Promising himself that he would do his best to bring the child home safe. His best he remembered, was in the end, not nearly good enough.

A sharp rap on his door stirred Severus from his ramblings. Hermione came in after a moment and she smiled kindly at him. "Severus it is time for the ceremony," she said. Severus stood and sighed, he moved over to the rather beautiful young woman that she had matured into, inclined his head towards her as a gesture of respect and tucked his arm around her's. Together they set off for the Great Hall walking slowly; they made their way downstairs, each of them lost in their own thoughts. They were heading for the memorial that had mysteriously appeared embedded in one wall of the Great Hall just three days after the final battle. The memorial was in the form of a plaque, 6ft tall and 10ft long and shiny as a mirror. A list of names and two short inscriptions were carved into the obsidian, which was as black and unfathomable as the irises of Snape's eyes.

Snape stood before the dark oblong and once again read the dedication. Not all of those named were dead of course. The Longbottoms still lived on and Dennis Creevey slept in St Mungos deep

in a magical coma, the energetic child that Snape remembered still at last, Ollivander had never been found, nor had Harry and as the years went on it seemed more and more likely that they were among the fallen and not simply “lost”. Severus closed his eyes and heart clenching with sadness he listened as Minerva read aloud the words carved into the stone, just as she did every year.

*For all those we have lost, or who have gone before,
We will hold you in our hearts forever more.*

And then the words of a Muggle poem carved starkly and plainly:

For The Fallen

*They shall not grow old, as we who are left grow old:
Age shall not weary, them, nor the years condemn
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them*.*

Under these words - which Hermione assured him, were read at Muggle ceremonies every year on the 11th of November to commemorate the dead of numerous wars - there was a list of names that seemed to go on forever. The list included adults and children, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff, Gryffindor and Slytherin as Death Eaters had in the last days killed indiscriminately murdering all who came into contact with them:

James Potter, Lily Potter, Gideon Prewitt, Fabien Prewitt, Frank Longbottom, Alice Longbottom, Sirius Black, Regulus Black, Albus Dumbledore, Amelia Bones, Florean Fortescue, Octavius Ollivander, Emmeline Vance, Bertha Jorkins, Cedric Diggory, Oliver Wood, Filius Flitwick, Rolanda Hooch, Gregory Goyle, Patricia Finnegan, Alastor Moody, Percy Weasley, Angelina Johnson, Terry Boot, Margaret Boot, Dennis Creevey, Rachael Morrison, Zachary Smith, Lucinda Smith, Malcolm Smith, Daphne Greengrass, Lavinia Greengrass, Geraldine Clearwater, Dedalus Diggle, Narcissa Malfoy, Lucius Malfoy, Harry Potter.

There was something about the way that Minerva read the names in her rich Scottish accent, at a measured pace, that was unbelievably moving. Severus studied the little group of people gathered around and thought sadly how few there were compared to previous years. The numbers of mourners diminished as people got on with their own lives and began to disregard the past. But each person here today, remembered for their own reasons, they were close to those named and would never forget.

Amos Diggory was here; thinking of his son and with him was Amanda Wood mother of Oliver. Oliver who had died alongside his girlfriend Angelina. Terry Boot and a number of other Hogwarts students killed during an attack on Diagon Alley at the height of the war. Penelope Clearwater was here too, daughter of Geraldine and girlfriend of Percy. Percy Weasley had finally had enough of the corruption at the Ministry and had lost his life trying to protect his girlfriend's mother and his own little sister from yet another Death Eater attack. He had failed to save Geraldine, but the fact that Ginny was alive today was thanks to his actions. Penelope and Percy's beautiful, doe-eyed daughter Amelia stood quietly beside her mother.

Draco was in the crowd of mourners too.

Head bowed, probably thinking of his parents for whose promised safety he had tried to kill Dumbledore and thus precipitated the final events of the war. Narcissa had died under prolonged Cruciatus, pleading with Voldemort not to hand her son to his Death Eaters to use as they wished. Lucius newly freed from Azkaban in the battle that had finally killed Moody died trying to prevent Walden MacNair from raping his son yet again.

Last year Draco had come later after the ceremony all on his own to pay his respects. But today he stood flanked by Hermione and Ron, Neville and Susan, Luna and Dean, Ginny and Blaise, Vincent and Pansy. Couples who had gotten together at the height of the fighting or soon afterwards and stayed together ever since. They were here with their children, some of whom were still just babies, hoping to ensure that their lost friends were never forgotten. All those lives senselessly cut short. They had been the generation hit hardest by Voldemort's madness and as they took their places in the wizarding world they had sworn to ensure that such a war never happened again.

But still Snape wondered. The corruption at The Ministry carried on regardless. Scrimgeour helped by unscrupulous minions like Dolores Umbridge had outlawed dark creatures such as werewolves and giants, sending Hagrid fleeing to France to his beloved Olympe and Lupin and Tonks to goodness knows where. Every area of wizarding life showed their malevolent influence and Snape sometimes wondered if all the loss and destruction had been worth it after all. Without Albus, without Amelia Bones, without Harry Potter there had been no one influential enough to stand up against The Ministry and so in the end, the Minister and his cronies had had their way in all things.

He lifted his gaze to survey the room once more and his eyes met the chocolaty brown ones of Hermione, which shone with sympathy and understanding. Snape felt unworthy of all the support and quiet happiness that he had found after the war. So many people who were better in every way than he was had died and he could not understand why he had survived when others, far more worthy, had not.

But Snape was a Slytherin after all and that meant that he made the best of every opportunity. So when Arthur Weasley had turned up in his cell at Azkaban seeking to release him, he had gone gratefully with the gentle man.

He had embraced the friendship that Hermione had offered, deeply touched by the regular visits she had made to his prison room. Later on he had also developed a friendship with her husband Ron who he had gradually come to respect and trust. He treasured his time with Draco, eighteen months at Hogwarts now and slowly beginning to heal. And he also cherished his deep and abiding relationship with Minerva, who had doubted him only briefly and had defended him fiercely ever since.

Just before he turned to leave the gathering and head back to his sitting-room sanctuary in Slytherin tower he sent a silent prayer that all the fallen had found peace and that Harry wherever he might be, in this world or the next, had at last found the happiness that he so richly deserved.

Hermione tutted loudly and dropped the letter she was holding scornfully onto the table in front of her. "What's wrong babes?" asked Ron looking up at her over his copy of The Daily Prophet.

"It's just this letter from the granny of a Muggle born." She answered "Although this one must have had some links to the wizarding world from the amount of knowledge she seems to have, maybe she is a squib or something?"

"She says she doesn't want her granddaughter exposed to the dangers and prejudices of our world without a number of assurances that she will be safe." Hermione sighed deeply.

This year and last had seen a huge increase of children heading to Hogwarts for the first time. The inevitable explosion in the birth rate that had followed the defeat of Voldemort was surely a good

thing for the wizarding world? But a massive headache for Hermione, as most of the organisational details that would ensure that the children received a decent education had fallen on her slender shoulders.

Hermione had started teaching just over three years after she graduated and had been Minerva's right hand woman ever since. Together they had come up with a charm that ensured that the welfare of all magical children was monitored from birth, never again would there be a Tom Riddle or a child that suffered as much for his magical ability as Harry had. As soon as the child's name appeared in the ledger of magical births the charm was activated. It supervised their safety and development and alerted the authorities if there were any problems. Susan Longbottom nee Bones and Hannah Abbot headed up the department in the Ministry that watched out for the children. Deeply moved by the details of Harry's childhood that had emerged after the war they had guaranteed that no child would be treated as Harry had, and had indeed removed a number of children over the years from unsuitable homes both magical and Muggle.

Susan and Neville had adopted one little girl who was being abused. Pansy and Vincent had adopted twins. Crabbe's childhood had been less than perfect and once he had managed to overcome much of the prejudice that he and Pansy suffered immediately after the war for being the children of Death Eaters he had gone on to become a staunch supporter of all that Hermione was trying to do.

Crabbe now ran a small shop in Diagon Alley. He and Pansy had been supported, like a number of Slytherins who had come on hard times, by something called the "Lenoir Foundation."

This was run by an eccentric Frenchman who had come to prominence after the war - or at least his representative had - Lenoir, as far as anyone knew had never set foot in Britain. But he had nevertheless helped a number of impoverished Slytherin families and even paid legal fees for Draco and himself. Without Lenoir a lot of children and families of Death Eaters would have fallen on very hard times indeed

The Department of Magical Child Protection (DMCP) had become one of the good things that had come out of the war, however it meant much more work for Hermione. Muggle relatives were visited before their children attended Hogwarts, invited to visit often and gently introduced into the magical world. But with so many magical children reaching eleven over the last year or so Hermione just did not have the time to see them all separately these days. So families were brought to Hogwarts and shown around, introduced to the teachers and wooed and welcomed. The subject of this latest letter, the granny of one *Flora MacLeod* had repeatedly refused to visit without assurance after assurance and insisted that Hermione come to her.

"Do you want me to go with you?" Ron asked. He worked as an auror these days. Just as he and Harry had decided to do, so long ago. Ron was one of the best people that Kingsley had. He was fair and loyal, a good tactician and an honest man. He had slowly worked his way up through the department and was now Kingsley's deputy. He was however owed some time off and wanted to spend it with his beloved wife. "Where do they live? We could stop by, say hello and head off somewhere for a few days, what do you think?" He asked waggling his eyebrows at her suggestively. Hermione smiled and nodded.

"Go on then." She said, grinning up at him. "The family lives on the Isle of Skye. I hear it is very beautiful there, and it would be nice to have some time together I suppose."

He sidled over to her, grinning like the lovesick fool he was when it came to Hermione, wrapped his arms around her and then they sealed their bargain with a tender kiss.

Two days later they found themselves apparating amongst stunning scenery of mountains and seascape. “Wow!” Breathed Hermione, “This is beautiful!”

“Isn’t it?” Ron said, gently placing a kiss on her nose as she leaned into his embrace. “Where’s the house from here?”

Hermione looked around for a moment before spotting it, long and white, with huge windows, nestled in a group of trees and slowly hand in hand they made their way towards the home of Flora MacLeod.

Soon after, sitting in a bright, sunny farmhouse kitchen Hermione found herself being charmed by the formidable Fiona (call me Fi) granny to the elusive Muggleborn Flora.

Conversation so far had covered the weather today (“delightful for the time of year as it can be dreich around these parts in August.”), the journey (“no problems apparating thanks to your directions.”), and Hermione and Ron’s marriage (“happily for ten years, no, sadly, no children yet.”). Hermione wondered when they were ever going to get to the point when Fi MacLeod spoke again.

“So what guarantees can you give me that my granddaughter will be safe in your world? Can you promise me she will never be hurt, or raped or tortured by evil wizards?”

Hermione taken aback by the sudden change of subject and the harsh words, nearly choked on the mouthful of tea that she had just ingested. What on earth had this woman’s experiences of the magical world been in order to prompt her to say such a thing? Hermione had been asked numerous different questions in her time by Muggle families ranging from what employment was like in the magical world to what the dangers might be. But no one had ever been as blunt as this lady in her queries or as apparently knowledgeable in the way of Death Eaters.

So taking a deep breath, Hermione proceeded to explain how their world had changed. She told Fi MacLeod about Harry and what he had sacrificed. She found herself being scrupulously honest, citing the problems that existed but promising that the violence and cruelty that had characterised the Voldemort years was no longer happening.

Then she returned to the subject of her lost friend and talked long and lovingly about how much Harry had meant to them all. After the recent celebrations and the memorial service he was foremost in her mind at that moment and she spoke about him with passion and gratitude. Finally she finished and silence descended on the room. There was just the sound of an old clock ticking and sheep bleating in the fields surrounding the house to break the stillness. She lifted her eyes to meet those of the woman who had listened quietly to her story and found to her surprise that they, like her own, were filled with tears.

Fiona MacLeod opened her mouth in order to reply to Hermione, or perhaps ask her something else. But whatever she was about to say was never heard as the back door burst open and a small tribe of children tumbled into the room.

“Granny, granny, Finn’s hurt his leg!” Shouted a small boy excitedly.

“It’s bleeding.” Intoned a girl who could only be his sibling so alike were they.

“It’s okay, he fell onto a stone, but Daddy’s making it better.” Said the largest child, a girl with long red hair tumbling over her shoulders. “They are just coming.” She turned her grey gaze on Hermione and Ron. “Hello.” She said politely in her gentle Highland accent. “You must be Mr

and Mrs Weasley? I'm Flora, pleased to meet you."

Hermione lifted her hand to take that of the girl, when she was halted once again by the high pitched giggles of another child who was being swung into the air by a man, presumably the children's father, as he backed in through the kitchen door. He was tall and strong and brown, glowing with health and contentment. He seemed to bring the essence of the warm summer day, the sunshine and the happiness, into the room with him. He was laughing joyously as he flung the dark haired boy over his shoulders and showered his tummy with kisses. Slowly he turned to face them all with a smile on his lips and his emerald green eyes sparkling with mischief.

"Merlin's balls!" Exclaimed Ron, speaking for both of them as Hermione collapsed with shock into her husband's arms, "Harry James Potter! Where the fucking hell did you come from?"

*The poem that Minerva reads is 'From For the Fallen' by Laurence Binyon – go here to read the whole poem and find out about Armistice Day traditions in the UK
<http://www.defence.gov.au/ARMY/traditions/documents/ode.htm>

Part Two

PART TWO - FINDING WHAT WAS LOST

It was much later that Hermione sat at the kitchen table cradling a cup of tea. She thought over the events and revelations of the day, trying to get it all straight in her own mind, in order that she could explain it to others. Elsewhere in the house came the sounds of a very raucous bath-time session with Ron and Harry's voices raised above the joyful sounds that the children were making. The two men were tunelessly singing in unison about five little speckled frogs. Her hand still smarted from where she had smacked Harry hard across the face, as soon as she had recovered well enough to do so.

Her feelings had hurt far more than her hand however when Harry, her beloved Harry had stared at her coolly "Hermione." He'd said, "I can see that you are upset. But if you ever hit me again in front of my children you will no-longer be welcome in my house." With that, he had turned away from her and called to the children. "Come on kids let's go and wash our hands before tea."

Hermione's eyes had filled with tears as his smallest daughter took his face in her little hands and looked deep into his eyes. "Why did the lady smack you Daddy? She said, "smacking is bad isn't it, Daddy?"

"Aye Caitriona, smacking is bad, but the lady is cross with me for going away and not seeing her for a very long time. She didn't mean to hurt me". All her anger had evaporated then, and she had deflated like a punctured balloon, sinking back onto the chair from which so had so recently risen. With a deep sense of longing and sadness she had watched him gather his children and march from the room.

Fi MacLeod had then ushered them out of the kitchen. Through the house she'd led them. They passed a comfortable sitting room, distinguished by squishy sofas and shelf after shelf of books, until they reached a "sun-room" filled with basket weave chairs that overlooked the sparkling bay and the Cuillin Mountains. There Hermione tried to calm her churning stomach and still her shaking hands. She had missed Harry for such a long time, they all had. The wizarding world needed him so much, and all that time, all the time she. No. They, had been grieving. He had been living happily in this beautiful place, with his beautiful children, not thinking about them at all.

Fiona's voice cut into her thoughts "It is not how you think it is." She said kindly "He would not willingly have left you. You must know that?

Hermione did not know what to think anymore.

"Let me tell you how he came to be here and help you understand." Fi said, in her soft accent. So her story unfolded, and whilst she told it, the afternoon finished and the evening began. Harry and his children popped in from time to time with tea for them all and with cakes and biscuits. By the time the story was finished Hermione felt chilled to the bone, and angry about what had happened to Harry, and sorry for her actions earlier. She wanted to take him in her arms and make it all better and take away, even just a little of the pain that he had suffered.

Fiona had told them about her childhood friend, Mhairi MacKay, for whom her youngest daughter had been named. Mhairi had discovered that she was magical and had gone away from the Island to Hogwarts and Fiona had been pleased for her and supported her and written often. They had stayed friends and Fiona had gone to Mhairi's wedding as Mhairi had gone to hers. But whereas

Fiona had married a Skianach, a local man, Mhairi had married a wizard.

Fiona had had four children, the youngest somewhat later than the others, the daughter that she had named for her friend. Mhairi had had one child, a boy. That she and her husband John named Remus, after a favourite uncle of his. When he was six the little boy had been bitten by a werewolf, an evil beast that had fallen out with his father and who had targeted the child deliberately.

After that they saw a lot of Remus in the summer. This far north the nights in June, July and early August were just a few hours long, and that had kept the boy's transformations to a minimum length. He had played with her daughters and they had all loved and trusted him and kept him safe and apart during full moon. But when he grew older she saw him become sad and lonely. Afraid of what he was and the prejudice he faced. At Hogwarts he had made friends but they had all died or been lost to him, when he was barely out of his teens. One young couple that she had met just once had been murdered in their own home, whilst their child lay sleeping. She never thought to know this child, but he and Remus had appeared one day in her garden, and the state he was in, there was no way she could have ever even thought of turning them away.

Fiona MacLeod considered herself to be a good woman. She had listened to all that Remus told her about the wizarding world and found many things shocking and wrong. Fair-minded and free of prejudice, as she thought herself to be. But she had never thought to see what she had seen that day.

“Terrible things!” She said. “Terrible and cruel, and all of them done to a child.”

Harry had not yet been seventeen when he turned up on her doorstep.

“I didn’t think he would survive the night. I’ve rarely seen worse injuries and I have been a nurse for nearly forty years.

“He had been raped repeatedly, and tortured. His skin was torn and burned. He had open sores, broken ribs and a fractured skull.

“ Both his legs had been broken in several places, when masonry had fallen on him and Remus said that he had had to dig him out from where he was buried in order to bring him here. His magic had been fractured and it took several years to repair itself. For the first wee while though, I think it was only his magic that kept him alive. He was in such pain and the nightmares that he had every night. Time after time he would wake up screaming. He was not well enough to go anywhere.” She said. “Never mind, to a world that would worship him or try to condemn him”

Hermione shivered when she thought of what it must have been like

At some point Harry joined them and it was then, that Hermione and Ron had found that he had still not fully recovered from what had been done to him by Voldemort, and probably never would be. He hid it well, and it had taken them a long time to notice, but he did not know them unless he could see them to read their lips. Harry, they discovered, was deaf. Voldemort had taken his hearing the day of the last battle.

Then Harry had told his story and after he had finished Hermione felt that any words of sympathy she might have spoken would turn to ashes on her tongue. Harry had suffered more than she could ever imagine and the tale of horrendous pain and loneliness just kept tumbling out one horror after the other

“The cell that they kept me in was dark and damp and cold. So cold, even in July. They didn’t give me water much, but as it was very wet down there, I learned to lick the walls when I was

thirsty. They tasted of urine and copper and blood.

“When they first took me I was scared but I thought I could brave it out somehow. Then the Dursleys were brought in and I knew I had to get them out. They didn’t deserve to be there no matter what they had done to me. No one deserved that place. My uncle was screaming at me about how it was my fault what had happened it was all because of my filth – that’s what he called my magic.

“I wanted them safe, so I thought of Hogwarts and sort of pushed with my mind. ‘cause I didn’t have my wand, I just had to will them away and the next thing, they had vanished, so the Death Eaters punished me for that too.

“They held me down and beat me and cursed me and then.... Then....”

It was as if Harry were no longer with them. He had his arms wrapped around himself in a gesture of comfort. He was slowly rocking back and forth and his eyes stared at something only he could see. Hermione longed to hold him but as she reached towards him he carried on speaking, so she clenched her fist and returned her hand to her lap. “I was a virgin,” he said, “and there were so many. I was naked down below, they tore my trousers off and they laughed, and they jeered, and it hurt so much.

“I can’t tell you how much it hurt.”

His voice cracked and he swallowed hard. He took a deep breath and a moment later carried on with his story. He told them how frightened he had been, how lonely. He’d thought that it was his fault that he was there, because it had been he who had caused the deaths of Cedric and Sirius and Dumbledore.

“Oh Harry!” Hermione had whispered sadly, but he had not heard her. He was in a dark place, far away from this sunny sitting room.

Snape had come once or twice Harry told them, and somehow his presence had comforted Harry. His words had been harsh. But one time he had given Harry a healing potion and his hands when he touched him were gentle. Harry had known then, even before the final battle, that Snape was on his side. He had written notes to try and protect him and Malfoy, because he had despised of ever seeing the outside world again, and he thought they were innocent and didn’t want them to suffer. But despite the tortures, Harry had not broken. He could feel the power of his magic growing so he hid it, because of the Horcruxes; he knew they had to be destroyed before he could fight Voldemort.

Finally he had been taken before The Dark Lord to be mocked once again. He was so weak by then. Voldemort had told the boy that Harry had been, that he was going to take his hearing from him, and that on subsequent days he would take his sight and his speech. Finally using a spell to absorb his magic on Harry’s seventeenth birthday. Harry would not be killed, he was informed, instead he would be kept as Voldemort’s plaything for as long as he managed to live. He had nearly despaired.

But Snape had arrived and had rushed forward. Pretending to take the opportunity to curse Harry he had looked deep into the boy’s eyes and showed him using Legilimency that all the Horcruxes had been destroyed.

All except Nagini.

Then he had lifted his wand, acting as if he were about to curse Harry. Instead, at the last minute, he had turned and cast *Avada Kedavra* on the snake before being struck down by one of his

erstwhile comrades.

All at once Harry had felt a surge of strength and an infusion of courage. He had sensed that he was not really as alone as he'd thought himself to be. Others had been fighting for the destruction of this evil wizard too, and he knew he could not let them down. There was no longer any reason to hide his ever growing magical power, so he had stood up straight and as tall as he could manage. Sent Malfoy - who was cowering in a corner - and an unconscious Snape to safety, and finally after 28 days of imprisonment and pain, let his magic fly free to defeat Voldemort once and for all.

But it was during this last battle, that Harry thought the worst of the damage had been done when; tired of throwing curses, the two wizards had attacked each other's minds. Voldemort had repeatedly violated Harry's memories, desperately trying to destroy all the happy ones. Hoping that Harry would have nothing left with which to fight him. But fight him Harry did.

He had gathered together all his feelings of love, his now fragmented memories of his friends, and somehow - he was not completely sure how he had done it himself - he had poured all of the power that these emotions engendered in him, into the ruined, twisted creature that was Voldemort.

Sometime during this denouement of the battle Voldemort had tried to draw forth the magic of his followers. But Harry could not let that happen, so he had sent his own magic in pursuit of evil, and managed to remove the Dark Mark from every Death Eater who felt remorse, or who had not yet given themselves completely to darkness. The last words that Harry ever remembered hearing as the curse that the Dark Lord had used on him slowly took hold, were his own, when he screamed at Voldemort.

“No. No more death Tom. You can't have them. No one else. Not today!”

He hadn't been aware that every one outside Riddle Manor had heard his words clearly in their own heads. He hadn't known that they would never forget the final agonised scream that had eventually been torn from Harry's throat. He hadn't heard the strangled cries of the Death Eaters as Voldemort tried desperately to draw on their strength. Or seen the shock waves that had reverberated through the Order of the Phoenix, who were gathered outside, trying to keep the dementors away. Inexplicably, all at once, their Patronuses grew brighter and seemed to gain strength. He hadn't heard the shouts of surprise as Snape and Draco had appeared from no-where in the midst of this pandemonium, and he hadn't even noticed, that he was doing all of this magic instinctively, and without a wand.

The power had continued to build. Neither he nor Voldemort were prepared to yield. Until finally, after all else was done, Harry's magic had proved stronger and Voldemort and Riddle Manor had exploded in a cacophony of power and light and roaring noise.

When Harry had awakened he'd had no memory of who he was, or what had happened, and the only word he had known or remembered for several weeks was “*Libellule*”.

“*Libellule* is French for dragonfly,” he said. “I don't know how I knew that, I just did. A dragonfly visited me in my cell. It must have been lost. But I think it came several times?” He furrowed his brow, trying to remember. “It was so bright and graceful.” He gave a rueful snort and looked up at them sadly.

“I'm so sorry but I don't remember you, you know? Either of you. I mean I know who you both are. What you were to me, 'cause Remus told me. But I don't really remember you. Which means you must have mattered very, very much.”

“That’s what Voldemort did to me you see. He left all the sadness and hurt of my childhood. The beatings, the name calling, the fear a..a.andeverything else. But he took away the good things. He took my friends.

“I remember how much I loved Sirius, but that love is tainted, because I lost him so soon. Voldemort needed me to recall how much I loved Sirius, so that I could remember the pain when I lost him. It was the same with Dumbledore. But not you two I am afraid.

“He didn’t find my dragonfly though, cause I hid it, deep inside me. That was my one happy memory, the one that helped me win. I thought of the dragonfly and how bright he was. How beautiful. The happiness he gave me and that’s what I used to destroy the evil bastard.

“Forever this time!”

Hermione felt like her spine had been drenched in a bucket of ice water. She and Ron were both frozen to stillness on the wicker sofa on which they sat. The things that Harry had told them were so awful, unimaginable happening to their friend.

Those things had happened to a child!

Hermione tried to imagine how some of her students in the charms classes that she taught, would have coped with what Harry had had to deal with and found that she could not even bear to think of it. They were so very young.

And yet, it had happened to this man. It had happened to Harry and the worst of it was that he really did not know them or have any knowledge of their time together. No happy memories, to counteract the terror and the pain.

Ron stood suddenly and moved quickly towards Harry. Knowing her husband as well as she did, she knew that he meant to hug his friend. Offer some comfort. But as soon as he entered Harry’s line of sight, Harry flinched and gasped. He jumped backwards in alarm, knocking over a chair, sinking to his knees, in what looked like despair and then none of them knew what to do. Ron looked stricken, Harry looked guilty and started to shiver violently, and Hermione burst into tears.

Fi came in at that moment; she took in the scene in her quiet way and went over to her son-in-law. Hermione and Ron watched as she knelt before him on the floor. She waited until he was looking at her and then started speaking and making gestures at the same time.

What is she doing, Babes?” asked Ron, curiously.

“She is talking to Harry using sign language”. Hermione answered; “I think it is calming him a bit.”

“Sign language?” Said Ron

“Ssshhh,” Hermione whispered, though why she needed to be quiet she couldn’t have said. “I think if he is upset like this, maybe it helps? Helps him to concentrate or something?”

“Oh! I’ve never seen sign language before! It must be a Muggle thing.”

Hermione ignored him, she was watching Fiona intently.

“Mo Cridhe,” said Fiona, “it is okay. You will be okay. You are safe here. Do not worry, no one will hurt you”. She gently ran a finger along one of the tear streaks that had dried on Harry’s cheek, and then pulled him towards her. She stroked his hair whilst holding him close and rocking him gently. They sat like that for a while, with Harry’s head cradled against her shoulder. Soon

she tenderly took his face in her hands, just like her small granddaughter had done earlier and spoke again. “It is time to fetch the children from the Grant’s house, do you want to go or will I?” Harry watched her lips closely as she spoke and seemed to recover himself a little bit; he gave himself a shake and slowly stood and turned to look at them.

“I am so sorry” he said, giving a small shrug, “I was lost in memories for a while there. Sometimes they just seem a little close. Do you know what I mean?”

“Oh Harry!” Hermione breathed, “Can I give you a hug? Please?” She held her arms out, emphasising her words with a gesture. Seconds later she was in his arms and Ron was hugging him too and Harry was a sort of Harry sandwich squeezed between them being squashed by Ron’s arms and made soggy by Hermione’s tears. For a short while, it was almost like they had never been apart. But all too soon after that for Hermione’s liking, Harry and Ron had set off for the Grants’ house - whoever they were - and Hermione was sitting at the kitchen table, listening to the cry of the curlew on the shore outside, whilst Fi bustled about making something to eat for them all.

“He is not often like that these days you know.” Said Fi as she sat down, startling Hermione out of her reflections. “He used to be. A lot. Had flash backs and woke up screaming from nightmare. But that only happens rarely now. Seeing you both has reopened a few wounds I reckon. Not that I’m sorry you’re here mind,” She said patting Hermione’s hand comfortingly.

“That boy is like a son to me. He is one of the sweetest people I have ever met, and my daughter Mhairi set her heart on marrying him within hours of him being brought through the door.

“She was three years older than Harry and she insisted on nursing him. When he first arrived he didn’t know anything, not even who he was. He had no apparent magic, couldn’t speak. But Mhairi had always liked injured wee creatures ever since she was a small girl, and she fell in love with him and decided that they would be together.

“Mhairi was like a force of nature when she wanted something and Harry might have defeated that evil dark wizard but he didn’t stand a chance against my wee lass. She loved him and looked after him, but I think he only finally began to heal when he held Flora in his arms for the first time. I remember his face softening with wonder and I think that was the first time I ever saw him smile.” Fi’s eyes stared at nothing, she was far away from the moment, looking at the past, just as Harry had earlier.

“He was a good husband to Mhairi though and he loves his children. He is an amazing father, probably because he had such a dreadful childhood himself. He is determined to give his bairns the best, and this house is always full of laughter and fun, despite everything”

“Where is Mhairi?” Asked Hermione curiously, she had not seen any evidence of Harry’s wife yet and all this past tense was making her unsettled.

“Auch, of course you don’t know.” Fi answered flatly “My Mhairi died.” Hermione was stunned

“Mh..Mhairi died?” Hermione stuttered

“Aye, she went down to Edinburgh to celebrate her sister Iona’s birthday and she was killed by a drunk driver in Prince’s Street. Iona never forgave herself yet for losing her wee sister that way, though it was scarcely her fault. I miss her you know and Harry does and the bairns. Finn of course never really knew her, for he was just a wee toot when she died. Since then it’s just been me and Harry raising them.”

“He really has not had the best of times has he?” Hermione said softly.

“No. But he is an optimistic soul, he always seems to bounce back. I reckon he would never have survived this long if he hadn’t been resilient.”

“And what about you? I’m am so sorry you lost your daughter.”

Fi smiled at her sadly. “I do miss her, she was awfully special and I loved her very much, a mother can never replace her child, but I keep busy, I have my other daughters and my grandchildren and Harry of course. Would you like to see her? Remus took a photo of them not long before she died. It’s a wizarding photo, they are all wizarding photos, that’s why I don’t keep them in here where just anyone could see them.”

Hermione nodded and followed the older woman out of the kitchen and into a room next door. This room was obviously a study. It was cozy with red walls and more shelves of books, yet another large window offering a stunning view dominated one wall. On a large wooden desk in front of them stood a sleek new computer and pinned behind on edges of the shelves a plethora of children’s drawings in bright colours. The other walls were covered with photos of the children and Harry and a small blonde woman with elfin features and a bright smile, who just would not look directly at the camera. She and Harry were far too engrossed in each other and in their children to worry about the photographer.

“She hated having her photo taken.” Said Fiona, with a wry smile but she didn’t mind the wizarding ones too much cause she didn’t have to hold still for them. This is my favourite, it is the last one I have of her.” She picked up a heavy silver frame that sat in pride of place on the desk and handed it to Hermione. In this photo Mhairi gazed down at a baby in her arms who was obviously a very small version of Finn and then smiled at Harry who looked at her with such love that it made Hermione’s heart clench with sadness. Children who were all pointing and laughing and waving at the camera surrounded the couple, then the woman in the photo turned directly towards the photographer and smiled broadly and it was all Hermione could do not to drop it with shock for Mhairi Potter- MacLeod; Harry’s wife, bore a striking resemblance to Draco Malfoy.

When the children were around, the house seemed very full indeed. Hermione realised that it was the presence of these children, which had helped Harry recover from the punishments that he had suffered in his life. They quite simply adored their father, and could not stop kissing and hugging him. Watching him interact with his children it made her sad to think that this gentle, loving man had had to grow up as he had.

At the Dursleys’ trial the details of the childhood that Harry had endured emerged and the wizarding world had been shocked beyond belief. To think of a small child locked in a cupboard, beaten, refused love and affection. To consider that that small child had been the saviour of the wizarding world, the Boy-Who-Lived, if Dumbledore had not died he undoubtedly would have faced the same condemnation that reigned down on Fudge and some of Harry’s teachers that nothing had been done to help and protect him. Even as they protested that they had not known what it had been like for the child, that he had told nobody.

The answer to that of course was if they had looked closely enough then they would not have needed telling. The bruises that he had sported, the fact that he was so undersized, so poorly dressed. The hunger pains had disappeared with time, but Hermione understood that Harry still carried the other scars and indeed probably always would. Knowing Harry as well as she still did, despite the passage of years and distance between them, she knew instinctively that the lack of affection that he had suffered had probably hurt Harry far more than the casual cruelty of his relatives had done.

Looking back she thought that the fact that Harry had been abused should have been obvious to

anyone with any knowledge of child welfare; his apparent distrust of authority figures, the fierce independence, the inability to share his problems with others, the huge lack of self-esteem, not to mention his ragged clothes. Harry had always fought for the rights of everyone else but had never seemed to think himself worth defending, even his small stature and seeming inconsistency in magical ability wasn't that, what did the professionals call it? Signs of an "inorganic failure to thrive?" Hermione flattered herself that she, with her fairly extensive knowledge of child protection, would not have missed those signs, as so many others had seemed to do.

As children she and Ron and the twins had seen Harry's life as a bit romantic, something to rescue him from, they never thought about how awful it must have been to live through or considered telling an adult how bad it had been for Harry at times. Of course even they, who knew more than anyone, had never guessed at the full deprivation that Harry had suffered. But then no one had ever really looked at him properly back then had they?

He had been just a little boy when he had arrived, wide-eyed and scruffy, new to the wizarding world. They hadn't actually seen Harry as he was, nobody had. They had seen instead the Chosen One a beacon of hope, not a child. Never a child

But watching him before her this evening she saw that in some ways now at least he was happy. He and the children were laughing uproariously at Ron's antics at the dinner table. Her husband was clowning about, trying to balance a spoon on his nose, crossing his eyes at the effort. The children had already dubbed him "Ginger Bear" it seemed that Flora had come up with the title taken from one of the battered Enid Blyton books that she was currently devouring. Apparently the characters liked drinking "lashings and lashings of ginger beer" and as there were lashings and lashings of Ron, the name seemed to fit him well. The man in question did not even appear to mind the slur on his fiery locks as the appellation itself had come from the equally red headed Flora.

More chaos erupted as Fi declared it bath-time and the younger children all chorused in complaint. Ron, rising to his feet, increased the noise levels tenfold by roaring loudly in his bear persona and promising a severe tickling to any child not in the bathroom within 30 seconds. The delighted shrieks that met this declaration were enough to burst eardrums.

Squealing and giggling the children ran from the room pursued by a laughing Harry and a growling Ron.

Hermione rose too then and began to help Fi tidy away the dinner debris. It had already been decided that they were staying the night and their things had subsequently appeared in a pleasant bedroom, just along the corridor from the kitchen, waiting for Hermione and Ron to unpack them.

Since her arrival she had been struck time after time by how homely this place was, how tranquil. The warm colours and comfy seating arrangements, the slightly battered air about the house that did not discourage the rampaging children from treating it as a home. The longer she stayed here, despite the huge shocks that she had received today, the more peaceful and relaxed she felt.

Here and there if you knew where to look were the unmistakable signs that this was a magical family. A clock, not unlike the one owned by the Weasleys that told of the whereabouts of the family members took pride of place in the sitting room. The magical photos told the same story in the study. The wards that surrounded the property, that hid the house from those who were not welcome according to Fiona, were proof in themselves that a very strong wizard lived here. If she and Ron had meant harm to Harry or his children then they could have been stood staring in the windows forevermore and they would have seen nothing but an empty field full of thistles and sheep.

Harry had built this house himself it seemed, with concrete blocks, harling and mortar. With magic

and with love, and the very stones that surrounded it were imbued with the impenetrable shields created by his mother's sacrifice. A protection ensured by the presence of her blood in Harry and in Harry's children.

Even the sadness over the loss of his wife and the mother of the children had somehow been absorbed in this sanctuary. Hermione thought of all the letters that Fi had sent to her office seeking assurances about the safety of her granddaughter and Hermione knew that nowhere in the wizarding world could there be anywhere as safe or as beautiful and serene as this house.

As she sat there at Harry's battered kitchen table listening to the joyful sounds of his children's laughter. The splashing and squealing and the mock growls of the "Ginger Bear" that she could hear coming from the large family bathroom. She knew that if she were honest with herself, however much she might miss him, the wizarding world was not necessarily the best place for Harry or his family.

The shock of his return would reverberate for months. Flora and her siblings would undoubtedly be hounded as Harry himself had once been and the family would be public property as far as every one was concerned. Then there would be the approbation from those who had missed him or those who had expected a half grown boy to lead them to a different world from the one that had emerged after Voldemort's defeat. If he didn't want this for his family could she really blame him?

So if, she told herself firmly, when they finally did come to talk about the possibility of Flora attending Hogwarts, Harry refused to send his daughter to school or return his family to the magical world there was nothing she could truthfully say to dissuade him. She still cared deeply about him and by extension his children and she knew that she and her fellow witches and wizards owed him so much more than half-truths, stupid laws and the prejudice that currently prevailed in her chosen culture. She looked round the lovely, comfortable kitchen once again and then gazed sadly over the loch outside steeling herself determinedly for the very real possibility that Harry Potter may choose to never again return to the wizarding world.

*In case you are interested Fi's friend's name is pronounced "Vari"

Mo Cridhe means "My Heart". Fi as a native of Skye speaks Gaelic fluently and uses the language from time to time.

Part Three

PART THREE -RETURNING WHAT WAS MISSING

Draco Malfoy was heading back to the castle. He had done his rounds for the evening and whilst it would still not be getting dark until about 10.30 at this time of year he still liked to be in his hut before then, as there were a number of things roaming the Forbidden Forest that were not conducive to his well being at all. Finally inside the hut that had belonged to Hagrid once upon a time, Draco leaned against the heavy wooden door and closed his eyes with fatigue.

Everything was still so tiring. Things were better than they had been for a good many years he supposed, but when he looked back on his childhood and realised how privileged he had been, how loved, he could not help feeling just a little self pity. His life was so dissimilar from what he had expected growing up. He couldn't say that he did not deserve many of the things that had happened to him, because he believed deep down that he did. But sometimes he could not help wishing that things had been different.

If only he had gone straight to Dumbledore when he had been given that mission by the Dark Lord. He and his parents would have been safe, hidden and protected. They would not have died and he would not have ended up as a drug addict and a whore.

When he had first gone to the Dark Lord he had been so arrogant, so sure that Voldemort would accept him, welcome him. He was a Malfoy after all. He knew that he and his mother had been under a shadow, after his father's arrest, but if he could offer his services then the Dark Lord would forgive them, help release his father and things could go on as they always had.

Then he had met Voldemort for the first time.

He shuddered even now to think of it. He covered his face with his hands and sank into one of the rough-hewn chairs that furnished his kitchen. That monster, that distorted twisted face, he had been what his father had sworn allegiance to? How could he have done that? And in his turn Draco had made exactly the same mistake as his father thinking to find some power or the salving of a bruised ego at the feet of an evil megalomaniac.

Through all that long year Draco had felt so alone, so desperate and all he'd needed to do was to visit Dumbledore and throw himself on the old wizards mercy.

When they had run from Hogwarts himself and Snape he had been panicked, almost hysterical. They had apparated immediately to the woods outside what had turned out to be Riddle Manor. Snape had tried to get Draco to go home, promising that he would protect him and Narcissa, but again in his arrogance Draco had refused. After all Dumbledore was dead and he had been instrumental in that death even if he had not cast the final curse surely the Dark Lord would understand that and would not punish him too severely? But Draco had been wrong, very, very wrong. He realised now that the Dark Lord had never meant him to succeed, and enjoyed watching the pretty blonde son of Lucius Malfoy get what he had decided was coming to him.

Standing before Voldemort that time, had felt very different from the last. After Dumbledore's death, Snape had stood beside him gloating at his failure. Before he had had his Aunt Bella at his side, supporting him, egging him on. He had been bloody terrified, but not like this. The Dark Mark had hurt like hell, but once that had been seared into his arm he had known there was no going back. So he had swallowed his revulsion of the thing called the Dark Lord, squared his

shoulders and vowed to do his best to serve his master.

This time though he was surrounded by men in black cloaks and masks, and they were so sinister, so fucking frightening. He had known most of them since he had been a small child but he knew not a single one would lift a finger to help him. So he'd stood all alone in the midst of all those people. In front of him an ornate gilt throne in a large ballroom, not a small antechamber like before and this time of course he had fucked up. This time he would be punished.

“Ah, it is the littlest Malfoy,” hissed Voldemort smirking down at him with his twisted, distorted features. “He couldn’t do it hhmmm Severus? A fool and a coward just like his father. He is not much use as a Death Eater is he?”

“So what can we use him for? Well he’s pretty enough lets see what he has to offer.

“All right, littlest Malfoy. Strip!”

Draco had thought he was going to be sick. He started to tremble in earnest; surely Voldemort couldn’t mean that could he?

“But my Lord,” said Severus, standing somewhat closer to Draco, “ He is just a child, I’ll take him away and punish him if you like, you needn’t see him again, if he offends you he can assist me in my lab.”

Voldemort turned to Snape then and narrowed his eyes “Severus you have feelings for the boy don’t you. You want him for your own?” Draco’s eyes widened at the thought of Snape having sex with him and he started to tremble, but later on he looked back and wondered how he could have felt such revulsion for Severus, he at least would have been gentle and considerate when he fucked him, unlike so very many others over the years.

“Yes, M’Lord,” Snape said bowing his head to Voldemort

Draco froze in horror, but Snape was standing very close to him now and under the cover of the long sleeves of their robes he gently squeezed Draco’s hand, just once and then let it fall back. And Draco knew that he had been a complete and utter fool. Severus had been trying to protect him all along, and he hadn’t wanted the glory. He was trying to dissuade the Dark Lord from doing whatever it was he was planning with Draco, and Draco just knew he had to play along. He fell to his knees then, ready to beg, he did not want to think about what was in store for him. He couldn’t think about that.

“Ppp..please” he begged “ Please Master, I’ll serve you how you wish.”

“Severus” Purred Voldemort red eyes gleaming with delight, “he wants to serve me. You don’t share your toys and I want to watch. You can have him later maybe. Don’t ask again Severus, I have been lenient with you because of your magnificent success with that old fool Dumbledore.

“Leave now and I’ll let you have him to play with later. He is far too arrogant this son of Lucius and I want to see him broken. But I’ll save him for you, I won’t have him killed tonight at least.” He turned again to Draco and said more firmly this time. “Strip or I will have your clothes torn from you.”

Draco could see that Severus dithered, he could not seem to leave him alone here, but one more look from the Dark Lord stopped him moving forward towards Draco again and with a deep bow to Voldemort he turned on his heel and swept from the room.

Draco shit himself.

He felt the watery liquid run down his legs and he started to whimper. "Nononono, please no," he murmured, head down, unable to look at anyone. Then he was lifted to his feet, his clothes were unceremoniously ripped from his body and he felt a cleaning charm being used to get rid of the mess that his bowels had left on his body, he tried to struggle but one of the men who held him backhanded him across the face knocking him to the ground.

"Do it now!!" He said, "do not disobey our Lord." and Draco realised that the man was his own uncle, Lestrange, then he knew for certain that tonight for him there was to be no escape. "Sorry, sss...ssorry." he mumbled pulling himself back to his knees with trembling fingers, he struggled to remove the remains of his ruined clothing. "M' sss...ssorry." He was shivering so hard he could hear his teeth chattering, but nevertheless he struggled to his feet, completely naked he tried to cover himself, sobbing openly now.

As he stood his hands were roughly pulled behind his back and tied there with something thin and leathery.

The men surrounding him had known him all his life and yet not one of them protested against his treatment, instead he heard laughs and taunts and promises of how hard they would fuck him. Bound and naked there was nothing he could do but obey when the Dark Lord commanded him to turn around slowly so, "they could all see what was on offer." So turn he did.

"Look at him, he loves it the little tart." Said one merciless voice, "Loves being the centre of attention. Always did, nasty piece of shit that he is."

Dirty little bastard," said another, "he can't wait to get a cock inside him!"

Then they started to bid on who would be first. They were bidding currency alright, but they were bidding knuts, knuts to see which one would fuck him first and then Draco realised that they were not bidding on him, but on a thick black leather collar that Peter Pettigrew was holding high in the air. It went for thirty-three knuts and some promises of appalling things to be done to him. Finally purchased, the collar was thrown into the crowd of crowing, baying men. Walden MacNair came forward and buckled it firmly around Draco's neck, grabbing his arm, he began to drag Draco to a table that was placed in the centre of the room. Draco started to plead again now and to try and pull away. "Nononono, pp...ppplease no pplease pplease."

MacNair put his face close to Draco's then, so close that Draco could feel the hot fetid breath against his neck. "Oh Yesss boy," he growled harsh stubbled cheek pressed against Draco's smooth one. "You're mine now. No Daddy to get you out of this one. I am going to fuck your pert little arse until you bleed!"

Draco found himself bent over the table and held in place with a strong hand, one that no matter how much he struggled against it would not let him get away. Still sobbing in despair Draco became still and endeavoured to relax as much as he could to try and prevent the pain he knew was coming

He felt the hard tip of MacNair's cock against the tender entrance to his arse, just breaching the tight muscles, when he heard a commotion and the door to the chamber burst open. Narcissa Malfoy flew into the chamber like an avenging angel and Walden MacNair went crashing across the room propelled by a curse from Draco's mother.

Draco had tried really hard over the years not to think about what had happened later that evening. Muggles had drugs that helped you forget, even if it was only for a while. But when Weasley found him Muggle substances didn't do much for him anymore and his veins were beginning to

collapse from all the shooting up he had done. He knew that he would finally have to remember what had happened because he could not bury it inside himself any more.

If he had not been a wizard then the sheer quantity of drugs that he had taken over the years would undoubtedly have killed him. But Draco was a wizard despite his ten-year-long absence of wand. Those memories never really left him; they always lingered in the corners of his mind haunting him. They were so hard to deal with, so fragmented, so agonising. The evening that he had gone before Voldemort something inside Draco had shattered forever and by the time morning had come he knew looking back that he had been quite, quite mad.

Here and now in his little hut, scenes from that horrid night played again clearly in his mind and he climbed into his bed, fully clothed. He pulled the fluffy duvet that Hermione had given him up over his head, squeezed his eyes tight shut and tried to will the memories away. But the images washed over him faster and faster and Draco knew that nothing now would stop the assault on his consciousness.

He remembered the Dark Lord not being too happy with his mother's attempt to break up his little party.

“Ah Narcissa,” He had said. “Do join us. But what is all this? Don’t you want your little boy to live? Because his only use to me is as a fucktoy.”

“You fucking bastard,” She screamed “haven’t you had enough from my family? He is just a child. Take me instead.”

“But Narcissa, I don’t want you my dear.

“Maybe you don’t like the thought of Walden being the first of the many Death Eaters having fun with your son tonight? You never liked him much did you? Tell you what I’ll give you that, as a favour to an old friend. Wait your turn Walden. Fenrir, why don’t you start the ball rolling so to speak? Cissa let’s give you a little something to take your mind off Draco’s screams and hear some of yours as well, you always had such a lovely voice.

“Crucio.”

And Narcissa did scream then. Draco had somehow, with his arms still bound behind him picked himself up from where he had fallen and tried to go to his mother but the Death Eaters grabbed him, forced him back to the table and held him down as Fenrir Greyback, growling in anticipation took out his thick red cock and rammed it deep into Draco’s unprepared hole. The werewolf sank his teeth into Draco’s back as he breeched him and Draco’s screams of agony joined his mother’s echoing around that large, gracious, uncaring room.

It was much, much later that someone finally cut Draco’s hands free.

The leather cord had cut deeply into his wrists and his shoulders were agony from being forced back into such an uncomfortable position. Whoever it was held a cup of cool water to his lips and he couldn’t help but gulp it down, it felt so good against his sore throat.

“I’m so sorry, Draco.” Said a voice, “I had to leave, I couldn’t see them do that to you, to Cissa,” The man held him then and started to sob. Draco didn’t know what the man was crying about. He hadn’t just been fucked by about twenty men, he wasn’t covered in blood and spit and piss and come.

Draco found himself being gently wiped down; the man was using the ruined clothing that had been left scattered around to try to clean away the worst of the dried on fluids that covered him. It hurt a lot ‘cause there was so much of it and he was sore all over, but especially his bum.

“I want my Mummy,” Draco croaked. He knew she was here somewhere because he had seen her earlier. Draco knew it was time to go home, he didn’t like being here anymore, cause mean men kept sticking their dicks in his mouth and his arse and that just wasn’t nice. His Daddy would be really cross when he found out.

So Draco pulled himself away from the man and crept over to the corner where he had last seen his mother, hoping that she hadn’t gone without him like she once threatened to do at Pansy’s house when he had been naughty. But no she was still there. So he crawled to her and went to cuddle close. But his mummy was cold, so Draco didn’t know what to do. He whimpered quietly to himself then he got up and looked about for bit.

Finally he found the cloak that he had been wearing when he came in. He wrapped it around her as best he could, then lay down beside her and cuddled in.

“Sshhh Mummy don’t cry,” he said gently patting her cheek, “Shh!” Curled up against her he knew that the house elves would come in soon with hot chocolate, and Daddy would be back and he would be cross if Draco was up past his bedtime. So he pressed his sore body against the cold one of his mother, put his thumb in his mouth like he used to do when he was very small and slowly drifted off to sleep, humming very softly to comfort himself and his mummy and keep the bad dreams away.

Later that morning they had taken his mummy away and fucked him again.

Draco had been watching the boy for some time now. He hadn’t dared go too close ‘cause then the badmen would be cross with him and it hadn’t been so terrible lately. They didn’t hurt him much these days when they fucked him. He didn’t know if that was because they were gentler or because his arse was broken in. Sometimes the cryingman gave him potions to drink and they made the soreness go away. Draco didn’t like the cryingman because he kept looking at Draco with sad, wet eyes and that made his tummy feel funny inside.

So Draco had been avoiding him hiding here in the cellar.

Uncle Lestrange had fucked him just a short while ago and now he had a plug in his arse with a tail on that matched his hair. Draco liked that cause it tickled the backs of his thighs and it was silky. The plug didn’t feel too big anymore like it used to and Uncle Lestrange enjoyed putting it in him’ cause he said it kept his spunk inside Draco and marked him as his for a while.

Draco didn’t mind so much when Uncle Lestrange played with him because he stroked him gently all over while he was fucking him and didn’t bite his shoulders like Greyback did or piss on him or force his cock down his throat like MacNair. He just bent him over shoved his dick in his arse and came fairly quickly. He always gave Draco chocolate to eat after he’d rammed the plug in and told him he was a good boy. So Draco thought he probably liked him and Draco liked being liked.

But today he wanted to play with the boy. The boy had nice green eyes and his dark hair looked soft and Draco wanted to touch it. He was crying and Draco wanted to comfort him cause he was lonely too now that his mummy didn’t come back or his daddy.

“Hello boy.” He said finally plucking up courage and crawling closer to the cage in which the boy was huddled. “Why’re you crying boy? Don’t you like it when the badmen fuck you? ‘Cause it doesn’t hurt so much after a bit and sometimes they give you chocolate and pretty jewellery see?” He fingered the rings that the snakeman had had put in his nipples and cock and poked his tongue out to show the boy the stud that went through it. “I play with this sometimes in my mouth” He said lisping as he spoke with his tongue out, “and they like it when you run it on their dicks it

makes them come faster and that's good isn't it?"

The boy had stopped crying and was looking directly at him so Draco thought he must be doing something right, he carried on showing the boy the pretty things he was wearing. "They got me a nicer collar. I had a black one before but it was ugly, this one is red, I like red. It's always been my favourite colour. And look at my tail! It's the same as my hair!"

Draco stopped then because the boy was saying something and Draco had to listen cause sometimes people said important things and if you didn't hear them they beat you or burned you or pulled your hair or twisted your arms and those things really hurt.

"Malfoy?" said the boy "D...ddraco?"

Draco was surprised cause the boy knew him? Had he fucked Draco then, because the boy was pretty and not fat or ugly or smelly, well not very smelly and Draco was sure that he would have remembered being fucked by him?

"Do I know you boy?" He said "have you fucked me then? Cause I don't remember."

"Oh Draco, what have they done to you?"

The boy had moved away from the corner in which he was huddled and shuffled painfully nearer to the bars and to Draco. He had reached out with his arms and looked like he wanted to cuddle him. Draco was really excited and rushed forward cause he liked cuddles and nobody ever cuddled him here. And then he was in the boy's arms and Draco was so happy because he knew him, he knew the boy even if he didn't know where from and he knew that he wouldn't hurt him, not deliberately anyway. Draco was safe here with this boy.

"Poor, poor Draco," The boy was saying and Draco nearly wet himself with joy because this was so nice, and then the boy was stroking his hair and his face and Draco's cock got really hard and it almost never did that and Draco knew that the boy must like him, really like him, not just pretend like him as the badmen did when he was sucking their dicks.

And then the boy was wrapping something about him and it was warm and soft and Draco was never warm 'cause he was always naked and it was always cold here. So he snuggled in as close as he could with the cage in the way and the boy looked deep into his eyes and seemed to understand him. Boy knew what it was like to be fucked by badmen and held down and hurt so he wouldn't hurt Draco, he'd keep him safe, he'd proved his goodness by hugging him closer and smiling at him.

They sat like that for quite a long time, cuddled together. Draco was humming to himself like he did when he was happy, or frightened and wanted the monsters to go away and to not fuck him or hurt him anymore. The boy was tracing idle circles on his back and it was really lovely, then rather awkwardly Draco thought Boy pulled him closer still and leaning through the bars gently placed a kiss on his forehead. And it was wonderful, sitting there so warm and peaceful and cared for with the plug inside him gently nudging against his prostate. Then unable to stop himself, his cock throbbing with the sheer pleasure of it all. Draco came. He came hard and he hadn't done that not in all the time he had been here and as he came a name sprang into his head clear and sharp. And he couldn't help himself but yell it out as his cock pumped itself into the soft warm blanket. "Harry." He shouted "Oh God. Harry."

Harry had protected him.

Draco hadn't realised it at the time but looking back he knew that it was so. How could he have realised though? Wizards couldn't use some sort of bastardised notice-me-not spell without a wand and without even saying the words could they? Well apparently Harry could and did! Thinking back in his more lucid moments over the years Draco had realised that from the day that Draco had first crawled into Harry's cell, the Death Eaters had more or less left him alone.

Occasionally Draco would see MacNair or Greyback eyeing him up, but then soon enough they forgot about him and went back to whatever it was they were planning to do before they thought of him. Once MacNair had held him down and tried to fuck him but his cock had stayed as limp and unresponsive as Draco's had been all those times that he had been fucked when he hadn't wanted to be.

Most of the time Draco just hid away in the cellar, sometimes the badmen would give him some food and he always had the blanket that Harry had transfigured for him so he was never cold now. The cryingman found them too, Draco liked him more now because sometimes when he thought nobody was looking he would be nice to Harry and though he said mean words his eyes were damp like they had been before when he looked at Draco. Quite a lot the badmen would take Harry away and give him lots of pain and Harry would cry and scream. But he would curse them too; he never gave in, not once, not like Draco had. But the best times were when it was just he and Harry, and they cuddled close and talked to each other.

Harry said that they hadn't always been friends before when they knew each other. But that now they were and that Harry would be Draco's friend for always and that he would look after him and Draco knew that his home was with Harry now because he had nowhere else to go. And as the badmen left him alone and as time went on he began very slowly to get better. He started to remember things sometimes, fragments of his old life – not always welcome. Things that he had just not allowed himself to think about and Harry had always been there and had comforted him when he cried and that was good because sometimes Draco cried a lot.

Draco remembered that the cryingman's name was Snape and he knew that even though he worked for the snakeman he still tried to help Draco when no-one was looking, and he remembered that the badmen were called Death Eaters and that they had killed his mum and that later his dad had tried to protect him and then he had died too. Draco felt that it was his fault because his mum and dad would not have died if it had not been for him but Harry said not to think that way.

"Trust me Draco," he had said, "I know all about misplaced guilt."

One day Draco remembered that once, when they were younger, Harry had hated him and he was so distraught, so very upset, that he couldn't stop crying for a long, long time after that. But Harry had held him and stroked his hair and finally he had calmed down and Harry had said that he had never really hated Draco. Not like he hated Voldemort and that it didn't matter anyway because Harry loved him now and always would. Draco told Harry that the name Voldemort was French and that it meant "Flight of Death" and Draco thought that that name suited him really, really well because that's what he did bring in his wake, death.

So then they discussed French and the fact that Draco was completely fluent in the language and gradually more of Draco's submerged personality started to show. He was talented at languages and a good teacher and he loved giving Harry something in return for bringing him back from insanity, for that indeed was what Harry had done. And so that was how Draco Malfoy came to spend his days and nights in a damp cold cellar surrounded by evil and madness and torture, teaching Harry Potter the glorious language of French and somewhere in those long hard weeks filled with Draco's fear and Harry's pain and the lack of tomorrows, the boys fell deeply, completely, in love.

“Hmmm,” Harry said one morning when they were discussing names.

Draco had known all kinds of things about the Potters. Harold was apparently a fairly traditional name for Potter males and most of them bore it somewhere amongst their titles, it stretched back to an ancestor of the Potter line who had died at the battle of Hastings when someone had stuck a wand in his eye. Potters apparently lived long healthy productive lives or burnt out young in a blaze of glory. Draco had become quite upset when Harry had said there would be no prizes for guessing which kind of Potter he was then!

But Harry had laughed and Draco had smiled despite himself and said that he could never understand how Harry could find things to be joyful about in a place like this.

“It’s not that different from when I was a kid,” Harry’d said. “Sure the Dursley’s didn’t torture me with quite the same finesse as Tom’s little slime balls do, but the rest of it, no food, small dark places, nasty names. Been there, done that and Dudley has a tee-shirt to prove it that I’ll probably end up wearing one of these days!”

Draco’s heart ached when he thought of the little boy Harry had been locked away and treated so badly, and then he started to think of his own childhood, and then he remembered his parents and he got upset again, especially when he remembered that his mother used to call him “Petite Dragon.”

Because Dragon in French was the same as it was in English.

Then Harry had laughed at him said that he had never met anyone less like a dragon in his life than Draco was.

Draco bristled a bit at Harry’s laughter and said that he was a typical dragon if you followed Chinese star signs! He was proud and flamboyant and he admitted he could be a little arrogant at times. But Harry said he didn’t follow any star signs if he could help it because it reminded him a bit too much of Trelawney and her forecasts of death

“Were you born in the year of the dragon then Draco?” Harry had asked and Draco had rolled his eyes at Harry’s ignorance

“No, we were both born in the year of the Monkey.” Draco said seriously, He had been resting his head on the bars of Harry’s cage close to Harry’s own head and noticed that Harry had suddenly moved away, turning quickly Draco saw that Harry was about to explode into giggles

“Monkey?” He spluttered “MMMonkey. Oh God. Monkey. Draco Malfoy is a monkey,” Harry howled. He rolled about on the floor clutching his sides literally roaring with laughter, he laughed until he could make no more sound and was just emitting little squeaks of mirth. He laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks. And Draco was torn between annoyance that Harry should find him so funny, and delight that Harry should laugh so much! But later when all the laughter was over and Harry once more had his arms wrapped around Draco he looked deeply into his eyes and said.

“You’re not a dragon you know, whatever your mother said. Sure you’re beautiful, magnificent like a dragon is and you can be fierce and you’re loyal to those who belong to you but you’re more than that. When you move its like watching a poem... you are so graceful, so bright. If I hadn’t had you with me I think I might have given up. I wanted to get you out of here but there was nowhere to send you, nowhere safe, at least here I could protect you. Being in this place has been the worst time of my life but being with you is like heaven Draco.

“You have sunlight in your hair. Did you know that? And when you smile, God when you smile, it’s like I’m not here anymore but somewhere beautiful, somewhere filled with light. Do you know what you remind me of?”

Draco had been struck dumb, no one had ever said anything like this to him before and he simply could not answer instead he looked at Harry with large grey eyes and slowly, solemnly shook his head.

“You’re a dragonfly, that’s what you are.” Harry said triumphantly. “When you move, when you come to see me it’s like you are dancing in my heart. My special, beautiful, ephemeral, dragonfly!

Draco was moved to the bottom of his very soul. He had not even guessed that Harry knew words like ephemeral, never mind that he would use them in such a context, use them about him!

Tears sprung to his eyes as they had all too often lately, but these tears were because, no matter what happened to them in the future, whatever that future might be he knew that this funny, brave dark haired boy truly loved him, and was prepared to say things like that and not be embarrassed or ashamed. Harry’s words became Draco’s greatest treasure, one that he kept safe and secure and would think about very often in the dark years to come.

“Libellule” He whispered

“What?” said Harry “I missed that Draco, say it again.”

“Libellule, it is French for dragonfly.”

“Ah I see. Well that’s what I’ll have to call you from now on then won’t I? Ma petite Libellule.”

Then Harry said the words that to Draco became the most beautiful he had ever heard “Je t’aime Libellule.” Then tenderly, gently, Harry had placed a tender loving kiss on Draco’s pouting lips before pulling him into a close embrace.

Part Four

PART FOUR - RETURNING WHAT WAS MISSING

Harry was sleeping again; he slept a lot now.

Draco could see him getting weaker every day. His skin was cold and clammy and his glorious green eyes had lost their sparkle. For a long time Draco would sneak him food, but lately Harry couldn't seem to keep anything down. He had been sick again earlier and nothing but a little watery bile had been the result.

Harry had sobbed with the pain of the almost dry retching and Draco had stoked his hair and sshhed his tears. Draco knew that Harry's body was shutting down, if someone didn't come soon, if someone didn't help them soon. Harry. His Harry was going to die. And what would Draco do then?

Draco was not worried about his own safety because Harry had already guaranteed that. He told Draco that if he were going to die then he would send Draco to safety.

“No one will harm you again Draco, not here.” Harry had said and Draco believed him. Harry had supported Draco through every tear, every bad dream. He had removed the rings that Voldemort had had him pierced with and taken the collar. “If you chose to have this done again then that's up to you, but you are NOT his pet and I won't let him have you!” Harry had growled and Draco had been thrilled, delighted and a bit upset all at once.

Thrilled because he loved it when Harry took care of him and told him what to do. Delighted because he loved being loved by Harry and a little upset because he had quite liked the rings – or at least some of them and he was quite fond of the collar - though he did agree with Harry about what they represented. So he hid them away and secretly made plans to take Harry with him to chose some more when they were free. Because that was one of the things they talked about, being free and together.

They lay for hours, hugging each other and making plans for their future. Wonderful, wild plans. Plans of travel and big houses, and food and no pain. They were both orphans so had no one to disapprove of their relationship. They would both be adult in the wizarding world soon and nobody could stop them being a couple if that is what they wanted. They would make a home and be together for always, that's what they had decided.

But increasingly Draco suspected that this dream would never happen because Harry was dying. Finally his body could not take much more of the torture that had been inflicted on him and he was slowly giving up. They came more often too now; the Death Eaters and Harry just let himself be dragged along. He just didn't have the strength to fight them anymore.

When he looked back to that time Draco didn't know how Harry had managed to stay alive as long as he did. The thought of the violence, the pain, the bruises and the broken bones he could not bear to think of those things being done to Harry, who had still been just a child. But such things were done; every day and Harry was fading fast.

On their last day together Harry had slept fitfully for much of the morning. He had not slept the

night before, waking screaming from nightmares and wracked with pain. Draco had not known about the nightmares until their last days together. One night, haunted by his own fears and unable to sleep himself, he had watched Harry toss and turn and open his lips in a horrified silent scream. Torn from his dreams by images that only he could see. Harry had lain trembling and panting. His eyes finally finding the terrified ones of Draco in the semi darkness, he had used a silencing charm. He always when he slept, by habit, he had not deliberately kept his nightmares from Draco, he had just always hidden them, he'd said.

So now Draco had taken to watching over Harry as he slept and soothing him when the bad dreams came and Draco began to understand that he truly was as important to Harry as Harry was to him. And when Harry woke from his nightmares and could not get back to sleep Draco told him stories. He had hundreds of them all told to him as a child by his mother. Tales of dragons and knights, princes and princesses, telling the stories somehow made him feel close to Narcissa too, and made him realise that his mother still loved him, wherever she was now.

On the last day, Draco had been retelling Harry's favourite story when the Death Eaters came for him.

"And the castle was surrounded by a vast thicket made of briars and thorns but the prince knew that happiness lay on the other side"

"Right Potter you little bastard it's time for even more fun than usual."

"So he took out his sword, which shone bright silver in the sunlight and started to cut through the impenetrable forest. The thorns dissolved under his blade and so the Prince cut a swathe through the barrier"

"Come on get up you lazy little sod." Harsh boots scraping on the concrete floor dealing kicks to already bruised ribs eliciting a groan from the victim of their ministrations.

"All day the Prince battled on, never giving up, no matter how harsh or unending his battle seemed"

Uncaring hands hauling him to feet that seemed unable to hold him up any more, dragging his limp unresisting form across the dusty cellar, leaving two wobbly trails to show his passing.

"Until finally the Prince came to a beautiful garden, filled with flowers. But everyone that he came upon lay deep in a magical slumber"

Up from the cellar they dragged him, Draco following at a safe distance. He had promised Harry that he would not let himself be seen, but he always came too now as if by watching Harry's suffering he might share it and somehow be able to lessen the pain for Harry.

"Then all at once the Prince came upon a beautiful castle and walked in through huge carved doors which opened easily to give him entrance"

"Ah Harry, so good to see you. You slept well I trust" Voldemort's sibilant tones punctuated by the cruel laughter of the Death Eaters

"So he walked through beautiful halls and up an intricately carved staircase following his instincts, following his heart. He passed more magical sleepers but kept on without stopping, searching for the end to his journey the deepest desire of his soul"

"Your battle is almost over now Harry and I have won! You will be come my plaything and I want you to know that everyone you cared for, everyone you loved will become mine, to serve me or to die." And Harry screaming in pain as they tortured him yet again

“Until finally he came to a room high in a tower, decorated with love and hung with beauty. And there in the centre a canopied bed and on it the most exquisite creature that the Prince had ever seen. She too lay in a magical sleep so he made her way over to her to see if he could wake her from her slumber”

“Ah Severus! You come to join us; do you want to have some fun with our little playmate? Please do go ahead, I know how you hate him, just make it painful; that’s all I ask! He is so weak now, finally giving up aren’t you boy?”

“The Prince stood gazing at his princess at her golden locks and the long silvery lashes that curled on her blushing cheeks and he knew that he loved her with all that he had. She was so very beautiful and he could not help himself, so he leaned forward and gently placed a kiss on curved, crimson lips. As he did she all of a sudden drew a breath and opened eyes that filled with love and wonder. And all at once the magic that had bound them was destroyed because the bravery and love of one man had set them free and they would never again be enslaved. Then there were many celebrations and much rejoicing across the land and they all lived happily ever after.”

Then a surge of magic which almost blinded them all came from nowhere. Severus was down, lying very still on the floor in front of the Dark Lord. But Harry, who had seemed so near death just moments before, stood tall in front of his tormentors, surrounded by magic, which was pouring off him in waves of colour and light.

“It’s not over yet Tom,” He said in a voice deepened and made strong by his magic. “You haven’t killed me, not with all your efforts and I won’t let you have anyone else for your perverted games.”

Then another flash and Draco was not with Harry anymore in Riddle Manor but outside in sunlight, held tight in the arms of a very surprised Ron Weasley.

Draco fought like a mad thing, like a trapped animal. He could not be here with Weasley; he had to be with Harry, needed to be with Harry. So he kicked and squirmed and wriggled, but Ron was much stronger than him and did not seem about to let go any time soon. So Draco took his hand and raked his long untrimmed nails down Ron’s cheek cutting him deeply and leaving three red raggedy trails in the soft flesh.

“Ow! You little bastard!” Ron exclaimed losing his hold on Draco as his hand flew to his wounds.

That was all Draco needed to be off and he ran over the uneven ground, down the hill towards the manor and towards Harry.

Ron was too fast for him though and he rugby tacked Draco to the ground. Falling hard he felt the wind knocked from him and the crack of at least one rib, but still he struggled and spat and kicked.

“No. Let me go! Harry, Harry. Let me go you fucking arsehole. Let me go!”

His words were muffled by Ron’s body, which lay on top of him, pinning him down, protecting him.

“Harry’s fighting him. He’s fighting for his life right now. Let me go, he needs me I’ve got to help.”

Then finally sagging helplessly against the other boy’s greater strength

“Please Weasley. Let me go.”

“No. You are to stay with me! I’ve got to look after you for Harry.” Said Ron, grunting as he tried desperately to subdue the squirming Draco. This got progressively easier as Draco gave in to despair.

Magic was everywhere, crackling with energy in the summer air and Draco looked up at the blue sky. Sky he had not seen for such a long time, sky that he and Harry had so wanted to see together and screamed his anguish and frustration to the heavens.

Struggling, looking for a way of release he noticed Snape close by and saw that he was being tended by Hermione and that Lovegood girl and he realised that Snape had killed Nagini. That he had not cursed Harry when he’d had the chance, and he understood all at once that Severus had been on Harry’s side all along, and Harry, Harry had known! But there was no help for Draco from Severus, as the man was unconscious and Hermione and the other girl seemed to be trying to revive him.

In desperation Draco tried once again to rake his fingernails down Ron’s cheek, but this time the other boy was too fast for him.

“Oh no you don’t you little cat!” He snarled as he used his big fist to trap both of Draco’s hands up above his head, “You’re not doing that to me again!”

But then Draco’s world erupted in indescribable pain and he felt like all his magic, his very life force was being dragged from him. All of the Death Eaters on the field that day suddenly lifted their voices in a single agonized scream and the magic surrounding them, if anything grew stronger yet. Pulsating with an energy that was almost tangible.

Suddenly the screams ceased along with the pain and Draco saw that his dark mark had gone his forearm was smooth and unblemished. Draco was free of Voldemort.

Then all at once in their heads, in the very air around them echoing in all their ears and in their hearts they heard and felt Harry’s final words to Voldemort, firm and strong and magnified a hundred times.

“No. No more death Tom. You can’t have them. No one else. Not today!”

This was followed by a roar of such terrible pain, of such anguish and yet such sure triumph that it was seared into the memories of each and every one of them for always. Finally there was an enormous, unbelievably bright flash of light and an explosion of sound as Riddle Manor collapsed in upon itself in whirlwind of brick, broken glass and dust.

“HARRY!!” Draco screamed.

Ron had released his hold and was staring at where the house had stood only seconds before. That was all that Draco needed to wrench himself free and run pell-mell naked and bleeding, uncaring of who saw him in this state, towards where Voldemort had died and where Harry lay somewhere under all that rubble.

The final horrifying image of that great and terrible day was of Draco Malfoy. Long hair wild and streaked with snot and blood, flying in the wind that had gathered with the destruction of the manor house, his face was marbled with tears looking like some wild demon of nightmare, kneeling in the wreckage sobbing and crying Harry’s name out time and time again, digging desperately at the debris with swollen bloody hands.

“No!” He shrieked as he woke to the morning and realised once again, as he had so many times

before, that Harry was gone and that he was alone. He sat for a few moments panting heavily his head buried in his hands.

But then warm strong arms encircled him and he was pulled close to the, firm comforting chest of Ron Weasley.

“Hush Drax, it’s okay” Said Ron soothing Draco and gently stroking his hair

“Stop calling me Drax!” Said Draco in a disgruntled voice, wriggling away from Ron’s embrace, “it reminds me of those fucking Muggle superhero magazines that Goyle used to love so much!”

“It’s alright!” Said Ron gently; I know how grumpy you are after you’ve woken up from one of your dreams. “Do you want a cup of tea mate?”

Draco groaned, he actually quite liked Ron’s nickname for him, it indicated to Draco, that somebody, somewhere, cared about him and that had not been true for a very long time. He had never had a brother and he loved it that Ron had taken that role with him, sometimes Ron’s easy affection; his rough camaraderie was all that kept Draco alive.

Ron never minded hugging him, he did it a lot. He and Hermione were the only ones to ever touch Draco these days and Draco appreciated everything that they did for him, he really did. But he was grumpy and he needed tea and he knew that Ron would understand so he growled under his breath and murmured, just loud enough for his friend to hear him.

“Fuck off you great big prat! What the hell are you doing here anyway, barging in like you own the place?” He was ranting now, trying to recover, disguise his anguish. Though why he felt he had to do that around Ron he did not know. Ron had seen him far more disturbed than this and usually just ignored the insults that he threw one after another at the stoic red head. It didn’t stop him throwing them though, just for old times sake.

He sat up, rumpled with tossing and turning and too little sleep only to be handed a steaming cup of strong hot liquid, he peered into the mug and complained “You put too much milk in it you arsehole.”

“Shut up Drax!” Said Ron in a low voice. “I’ve got something to tell you and I don’t know how to say it, and mate, it is fucking tearing me apart.”

Draco looked at him through bleary, morning misted eyes. This was a serious tone for the youngest Weasley male and Draco realised that something must be wrong.

“What is it?” He asked his voice beginning to tremble, just catching on the last word. “What’s wrong, Ron?”

“It’s Harry mate. Me and Hermione have found him. He’s alive.”

They were sat side by side on the lumpy chintz sofa that filled one corner of Draco’s little hut. Draco was sure that were mice in one of the arms nestled in under the puke coloured flowers and cabbagy leaves. But his policy on small animals was that if they didn’t bother him he would not bother them and wouldn’t his life have been so much fucking easier if he had discovered that philosophy years earlier and used it liberally?

Draco cradled another cup of tea; his hands were still red from Ron’s perfunctory healing, quickly applied when Draco had managed to spill the steaming cup of liquid that he had been holding all over himself. This mug of tea was only half full, “just in case.” Ron had said. It was just as well

that Weasley was being careful this time because Draco was trembling, like, well like a trembly thing which was the only simile that came to his befuddled brain he simply could not stop himself from shaking.

“Wwwwat does he look like, wwwhhy did he stay away?” He asked plaintively shivering under the blanket that Ron had thoughtfully draped over his shoulders.

Ron sipped his tea before answering. “He looks great Drax. He has kids now.” Then at Draco’s start, “but he’s a widower, his wife died. He doesn’t remember us though, none of us. Doesn’t really remember Hogwarts. Just has vague memories of you as this obnoxious kid that he used to fall out with all the time.”

“He doesn’t remember us, me and him?” Draco asked in a tiny voice. He couldn’t help the overwhelming feelings of despair that were coursing through him at Ron’s words

“Well that’s just it Drax, he’s been really damaged by Voldemort. He’s deaf and he was blind for a bit and without his magic for years. His memories were destroyed, all the good ones anyway. When we first saw him he looked at us politely like we were strangers. It nearly finished Hermione,” He said “nearly finished me too.” This last whispered under his breath.

“I...I...I couldn’t let you see him without knowing what had happened. He’ll be here later and Hermione sent me along to warn every one, but especially you. Hermione thinks that somehow he does still remember you. Deep down. ‘Cause his wife looked just like you. Could have been your sister. His kids look like they could belong to either of you.

“And then there is this thing he has about everything French and you mentioned teaching him that when you were together, learned the language he did, soon as he could and that can’t be easy without your hearing. But he did it and there is also his weird obsession with dragonflies. They are every bloody where in his house. Hermione reckons that might have something to do with you too? “*Dragonflies!*” Like dragon must have something to do with Draco. You know what she’s like when she gets an idea in her head, like a bleeding terrier with a rat”

“He’ll be here later?” Draco asked, his voice still barely more than whisper

“Yeah” Him and his kids and his mother-in-law who I call, “Fi the Fearsome” cause she frightens the living daylights out of me. We think she isn’t quite a Muggle, cause she can seem to see magic but she isn’t really a squib either she seems to be one of those Celtic hybrids. You know, does a bit of healing and stuff but no real controllable magic.” Ron was babbling now, unable to stop, as the words came tumbling out and Draco took in each one greedily, like food for a starving man.

He could see that Ron had had a shock over the last few days and he was telling it all to Draco in a seemingly unending stream of consciousness.

“It was fucking freaky mate,” Ron continued, “Harry and yet not Harry. And his magic is bleeding awesome! It radiates off him. I tell you Drax if he wanted to take over the wizarding world there wouldn’t be one of us who could stop him. He could do it just by lifting a finger. But he seems happy enough being a dad. And he’s awesome at that too! His kids are smashing!

“We thought he wouldn’t want to come back to the wizarding world, Fi was dead against it and Remus was too apparently. But Harry had decided that he wanted his eldest to start at Hogwarts when she was old enough, but he let his ma-in-law contact us. Thought we might think it was some sort of hoax if he did it. But he wants to make sure that it’s safe first, for himself. So he’ll be here at three and I have my orders from Herself that I have to warn everyone first, so...” He drained his cup. “I’d better get going, he’ll be here in a couple of hours and I’ve got to get back to help apparate his Muggle sister-in-law Iona, though why she wants to come too I do not know!

"You alright mate?" He asked, gently squeezing Draco's shoulder.

He nodded at the larger man, somewhat distracted. "Yeah, it's just so much to take in you know?"

"Tell me about it" Said Ron, "I still can't believe it myself, but he'll be here in a few short hours and I don't want to give McGonagall apoplexy, not at her age, so she is next on my hit list."

"Thanks Ron," Draco finally heard himself mutter, "Thanks for everything." He stood up and gave the taller man an awkward, one-armed hug and a tender pat on the cheek, which still carried the scars that Draco had caused in his anguish, so long ago. Ron had never held this mild disfigurement against Draco and when he had finally found him after never giving up on his search, he had told an apologetic Draco that he thought they gave him a rakish appearance and made him a hit with the ladies when he showed off his war wounds. Draco knew that of course for the rubbish it was, as there was no way that Ron would ever leave his Hermione, never mind to flirt with some mythical fans. But he really did appreciate Ron's attempt to make him feel better about, well about everything really.

"Thanks."

S'okay Drax," Ron said. "We're there if you need us, alright mate, just give us a shout yeah?"

Draco nodded, unable to speak and then he watched Ron for a long time as he headed up to the castle to fulfil his task of telling McGonagall the news.

Draco had arrived at the shrubbery at least an hour earlier than he needed to.

He had taken out his three robes and tried them all on and discarded them all and then gone back to the first one he had tried. The problem was, that none of them were suitable. What did you wear to meet your lover that you had not seen in twelve years, especially if all your clothes were little more than rags?

A man that you had only known as a boy with whom you had bonded in the midst of Death Eaters and cold dark cellars, acting as a dungeon? His mother probably could have told him, would have bought him something wonderful. But the Malfoy fortune had all been confiscated and his mother was a long time dead. Finally he had put on his second choice robe, because that after all had a hood in which he could hide, and slowly, he set off for his destination.

He waited for forty-five minutes, in the shadows of the trees. In his head, he said a thousand different things to Harry. Repeated some, discarded others and despaired of ever gaining any eloquence and then - after what seemed like an eternity, and at the same time, no time at all - he heard the crack of apparition and Harry was there in front of him, only feet away and Draco could say nothing, nothing at all.

This Harry was not whom he was expecting. From Ron's description of a brain damaged, deaf widower Draco had been picturing someone who was a bit more broken, someone who might welcome Draco in his life to help look after him. Not this strong vibrant man. Harry was stunning, heart stoppingly handsome; in Draco's eyes he was simply gorgeous.

There was no way that Draco could approach him. This was a powerful wizard. A man who could choose anyone he wanted in the wizarding world someone who, despite what Ron and Hermione believed, did not want to be seen with a broken down ex-crack-head and sometime

whore.

Draco was not good enough for this man. Perhaps if things had been different, perhaps if they had escaped together, then something might have occurred between them but it was too late. Twelve years too late and Draco was not about to inflict himself on the newly returned, "Hero of the Wizarding World". A hot feeling started in his throat and tears burned behind his eyes and he silently cursed the gods that would not give him a chance.

He shrank back as he saw Ron's eyes roving over the bushes, seeking him out. But Ron did not understand, he had told Draco how crushed he and Hermione had felt when Harry had looked at them like they were strangers. How much worse would it be for Draco if the man he loved with all his soul looked at him like that? Or worse still regarded him with contempt or disgust? Draco knew if that were to happen, he would truly break into pieces and he simply could not take the risk as he was barely holding everything together as it was.

Instead he watched the progress of Harry and his family. Bright, shining children giggling and chattering, a fierce looking woman with iron-grey perma-curls who could only be the formidable Fi, and another woman, with wilder, darker curls that Draco assumed must be Iona. In amongst this glorious clan were Ron and Hermione, perfectly at home laughing and talking with the others. So Draco watched them pass, almost close enough to touch and yet forever out of reach. As the family moved on towards the castle, another bit of his heart was turned to ice and his eyes began to shine with those as yet unshed tears. Then the eldest child fell slightly behind the others and stared right at him, hiding in shadows of the undergrowth. He was pinned by her gaze, unable to move. She truly saw him he knew. She seemed to reach deep inside him, judge him and read his soul. They waited like that for several moments, unmoving, unflinching, whilst time stood still

Finally the spell was broken and the child was distracted by a flash of colour. It was something made up of cobalt and emeralds, reflecting in the dappled light. It was ethereal, magical. It was a blue hawk dragonfly, dancing on the breeze.

Part Five

PART FIVE - SEEKING WHAT WAS HIDDEN

Severus Snape was not having a good day. He had been away on retreat in West Wales as he had been every year since the defeat of Voldemort. Annually, he got away from the chaos that was Hogwarts and indulged in quiet and structured meditation in a glorious sanctuary by the sea. He sometimes believed that this retreat was all that kept him sane.

But now he had returned to mayhem!

There were people gathered outside the gates. What they were here for he had no clue, and he was not planning on speaking to any of them as they all looked like rabble to him. He would question Minerva about it later. He hoped they had not had another shrivelfig disaster this close to the start of the school term, because that was just the thing the gutter press liked to revel in.

Once he had got past the obstacles at the gate he had run into another group gathered in the entrance hall. This party included a gaggle of very small children, and Severus did not do children in the school holidays, especially not ones as young as this group seemed to be. He had swept past, robe flying out dramatically behind him. He trusted that the formidable air that he still cultivated would once again keep him safe. Hermione had called after him, that there was something they needed to talk about urgently. He waved her off, signalling that he would catch up with her later and returned to his class-room looking forward to sorting through the potion ingredients that were supposed to have arrived whilst he was away.

He had spent a very pleasant hour cataloguing all the ingredients that had arrived, and an even more pleasant hour muttering darkly about those that had not. Severus had always expected to be let down in his life. By everyone, and he simply could not suppress a tiny surge of glee when his dire predictions were proved correct yet again.

He was going to see Minerva. It was just not good enough he had decided, some of the most important things on his list had not arrived and Severus did not see why he should have to put up with problems like this on his first day back. He was not a happy man! Was it too much to ask that he might get some peace and quiet before school started he wondered? He spent all year dealing with odious little brats and did not feel that he should have to put up with them in the holidays too.

He stormed along the corridors, cloak still flying out behind him, muttering to himself. He was well aware of the frightening figure that he presented; he rejoiced in it. He was after all somewhat out of sorts. He had still not got over the memorial and he did not like such things hanging over him. Not only tha, but he could not shake the thought that Scrimgeour was up to something nefarious, which Severus felt did not bode well for the future of the wizarding world.

He was cross, more than cross, disgruntled, unsettled. He was still feeling guilty after all these years, over his handling of the Potter child. No one did long term guilt trips as well as Severus did. So he remained generally out of sorts and well, thoroughly pissed off! And these latest events were not soothing his temper, not soothing it at all! He turned the corner into the Charms corridor the one that bisected Transfiguration, lifting his eyes as he caught the flash of something ahead. He was about to bawl out the miscreant for getting in his way. Then he saw what was ahead of him and his breath caught in his chest and the blood drained from his face.

Twenty feet away, standing in the shadows of the hallway, was Lily Potter. Not just Lily. Lily has she'd been when he saw her last, a young mother a woman on the threshold of life, but Lily as he first remembered her, an eleven-year-old girl. This Lily was not a ghost however. She was solid matter, full of colour and vibrancy, not nearly transparent and unearthly pale. Was she some manifestation of vengeance seeking recompense for the way he had treated her son? Severus knew that his time had come and he was chilled to the very bone.

She lifted her hand and pointed at him. And in a cold clear voice she said, "There you are, I found you. Don't think you can get away this time!"

And Severus Snape, the man who had fought Voldemort, the terror of many a child's dreamtime landscape and the scourge of Hogwarts pupils for twenty six years fainted clear away on the cold stone floor like some Victorian maiden in a florid romance. Just before he passed into darkness he heard a child's voice say, "Flora, I think you killed him." And he knew no more.

He woke with a start to find James Potter staring down at him, panicked he lifted his arms to protect his face and started babbling. "I am so sorry James. I didn't want to allow him to be so hurt. I....we had no choice. I tried so hard to get him out, but it was too late."

"Professor Snape?" said the apparition, interrupting this rambling string of words. "What on earth is the matter? I'm sorry my daughter gave you a fright, but I'm not James, I'm Harry."

There was total silence whilst Severus processed this information.

This was not James

"Lily?" He queried

"No that was my daughter Flora. She was playing hide and seek with her brother Rory. She does look extraordinarily like her grandmother so Minerva says, they did not mean to frighten you I am dreadfully sorry."

There was yet more silence whilst he processed that information too.

It had not been Lily either

The apparition had been a real child. Lily's granddaughter

Severus counted to ten and opened his eyes.

People surrounded him. Ron and Hermione were there and Minerva. The girl with the red hair, who did indeed look very like Lily Potter when she was that age. More children, some Muggle women, one of whom he noticed absently had rather glorious cloudy dark hair. Oh yes and Potter himself.

Severus had had enough. For twelve years he had nursed the guilt that he had been unable to rescue Harry. He had seen what the boy had gone through and could not imagine how he had endured it, had been unable to help him in any way without giving up his cover as a spy. Had cursed the fact that Harry had rescued him and not the other way around.

Then of course there was the way he had treated him as a pupil. And not only had Snape been horrible to the child just because of his father, but it had been his fault that Voldemort had gone after the Potters in the first place as he had told him the prophecy that he had overheard at the

Hog's Head that day.

Oh and of course after what Hermione had told him he had felt even worse about things because he had known then that everything that had happened to Harry, all of the bad things from the Dursley childhood to the rape and torture why they were all his fault too.

Now here the Potter boy stood, mocking him. Mocking his guilt and his anguish. Looking fit and healthy and happy, surrounded by his obviously loving family and very clearly no longer a boy. Severus couldn't help himself. After twelve years of keeping the lid on his simmering emotions Severus exploded. "You fucking bastard." He said coldly and lunged for Harry's throat.

The room erupted into chaos

It took several minutes to calm everyone down after that. Ron had needed all of his considerable strength to subdue an incensed Severus, who was intent it seemed, on doing Harry some serious harm. The children were crying and Hermione hugged as many of them as she could all at once. Finally she and Fi led them away from the escalating argument. Minerva was somewhat desperately trying to calm things down and Severus was threatening murder.

"You bastard!" he spat again, "all those years of guilt! All those years of regret, wishing you were here so I could make things up to you. Where were you huh, tucked away somewhere, breeding babies and laughing at us? I am going to kill you! I am going to rip you limb from limb you sneaky, ungrateful little sod!" The Muggle woman, the cloudy haired one, (who Severus noticed absently, had the most amazing ultramarine eyes) was waving her hands around and Harry was watching her intently not listening to a word Severus said.

"Just like old times then is it? Potter as always, too fucking arrogant to listen to anything I say" Severus roared, "just like your precious father, too good for the likes of me huh?" Severus yelled, he was beside himself with fury now

He turned on the woman suddenly. "Will you stop waving your bloody arms about I am trying to discuss something with this selfish bastard here and you, woman, are distracting me!"

The woman looked stunned but only for a second and then she flew at Severus bellowing back and giving as good as she got. She was still waving her hands about as she shouted back at Severus.

"You think he is selfish and self obsessed what about you? Have you waited to hear where he has been all these years? No. Did you even bother to ask? No you did not! You assume the worst of him with no evidence to back up your assumptions. You Sir are an arrogant bully! Do you think I am waving my hands about for the good of my health? Do you think it is some sort of bizarre exercise programme? This is sign language and I am trying to translate your senseless ramblings because, despite your bellowing like an enraged buffalo Harry is deaf and he unlike the rest of us, cannot hear a word you are saying. Which is just as well because ninety percent of that was self-righteous bullshit!"

Now sit down and speak slowly and calmly and perhaps he will be able to follow a civilised conversation. If you think you are capable of having one that is!"

Severus sat. Stunned into silence.

No one had spoken to him like that in years. Not since a red haired hell cat of a girl had told him off when they were children.

For the first time he looked directly at Harry. "You are deaf?" he asked

Harry nodded

“You were watching her because you can not hear me and she is translating for you?”

Harry nodded again

“But you can understand what I am saying now?”

“Yes, I can,” said Harry. “But you are speaking slowly and you are sitting still so I can see your lips clearly.”

“Oh!” Severus said, as he took a moment to digest that, and then

“You weren’t hiding deliberately just to upset us?”

Harry looked shocked

“Why on earth would I want to do that?” He enquired, “You are obviously very troubled professor, which is why I will overlook how much you have upset my children. I am really sorry that I seem to have distressed so many people including you it seems?” This last was said with a raised eyebrow and a querying look at Severus who nodded curtly just once. “Things were very hard for me for a while, I guess it just took a long time to get well again, a lot that happened, it is very complicated, but I can try and explain it if that helps?”

Severus saw that once again he had jumped to conclusions about Harry. He had seen Harry just hours before the last battle, when he had passed him the information about the Horcruxes. He had been frightened that it was all too late and that Harry would be too weak to fulfil the task of killing Voldemort. They had all worried about that. But Severus had been the only one to see the worst. To understand what had truly happened to Harry.

Then of course the sheer magnitude of magic that Harry had released that day had been phenomenal. If nothing else, the boy would have surely suffered for a very long time with a case of magical exhaustion. Of course it would have taken Harry a long time to get over everything that had happened. The miracle was that he was here at all, never mind looking as well and as sane as he obviously was.

How could he have forgotten that? It was just here, at Hogwarts, being confronted by someone who truly did seem to be the image of his dead father, Severus had lost all logic along with his temper.

“I..I...I am sorry Potter” Severus said, I may have over reacted, “but all these years of worrying I just saw red I am afraid.”

“I am sorry Professor but I don’t understand. Are you saying that you were worried about me. Harry? Why would you? I mean I know you saved my life on several occasions, and don’t think I’m not grateful but you never liked me why would you care what happened to me after the war?”

Severus felt wounded, as if Harry had just kicked him hard in a tender spot. But he forced himself to meet those green eyes without flinching.

“I have cared for some while about you Potter.” Severus said, knowing that finally after all these years it was time for the truth. It was not how he had pictured telling Harry, but Severus knew that he owed him years worth of penance and right here and now was when he had to start paying. He knew very little about deafness but he realised enough from what Harry’s relative had said that he

needed to follow her advice. So careful to look directly at Harry he said as slowly and distinctly as he could.

“I have cared deeply about your well being since I found out that you are my sister’s son.”

Harry stared at him with his mouth hanging open

“Wwwwat?” He asked, “What did you say.”

“You are my nephew Harry. Lily Potter was my sister”

“Well I was so not expecting that!” said Harry and sat down with a thud on the chair behind him.

It took a very long time indeed for Severus to tell his story. Once or twice he got somewhat upset and couldn’t continue for a while. Sometimes Harry could not seem to follow what was being said and Severus would have to wait for Iona to relay his words which he found very frustrating. But then how much more frustrating must it be for Harry? To have to have everything explained like that.

The story he had to tell was such a complicated one, so emotionally difficult for he, who had always been such a private man to share with all these people. It would always have taken a long time to tell, even in the most normal of circumstances which this situation most surely was not.

But he did it, he told his story and Harry absorbed it and Ron and Minerva, Iona and Draco - who had quietly appeared and stood now at the back of the room half hidden in shadows – listened. As his tale unfolded, Severus felt a weight had been lifted from his shoulders, because when he had finished his tale it would be up to Harry to decide what to do about it all and he would not have to make a decision any more.

“After the battle, everything was in chaos. I was arrested immediately as was any known supporter of Voldemort and poor Draco, who really should have been in St. Mungos not in a holding cell in the Ministry.” He looked towards Draco as he said this and the young man smiled sadly in acknowledgement.

“Hermione came to visit me frequently; she is such a fine person, because goodness knows I had done nothing to deserve her support. We talked about all kinds of things. What was happening with the arrested Death Eaters and what was happening in the search for you. They did search you know? Hermione and Ron and the Weasleys, the other Order members, they all wanted to find you. They knew you were badly wounded at best, but even if you had been dead we wanted something to bury. Do you know how bad it has been not knowing what happened to you?”

Harry hung his head at this, obviously upset, breathing deeply and refusing to meet anyone’s eyes for a moment or two and Severus had to wait for him to look up again before he could carry on.

“Anyway” he continued firmly, “there was such a mess after the building collapsed; according to Hermione there were blood and body parts everywhere and they couldn’t tell who was who. Who had died, whether anyone was still at large, who we needed to be searching for. So Hermione came up with the ingenious idea of searching for *Deoxyribonucleic acid* or DNA, it’s what Muggles use to identify dead bodies which are not visually recognisable for whatever reason. It is unique for each individual, except of course for identical twins and it works in just the same way for wizards. Hermione suggested it as a way for searching for evidence of you.”

“They took hairs from your comb apparently. Although I must admit it was news to me that you had one!” This last comment was said rather dryly but Severus moved quickly on at a scathing

look from the perennially annoying Iona. “DNA is apparently also a good way of tracking “matrilineage” which as should be obvious means the genetic line of the mother. Apparently it can be inconclusive as it can be contaminated very easily, but Hermione devised a spell for keeping the samples separated that everyone was very happy with. They took a sample of blood from everyone who was present and apparently, your blood and mine it... well it showed we were related. Closely related.

It showed that there was a very high probability that I was a sibling of your mother’s. Hermione and I kept this quiet; she “mislaid” the findings in a folder somewhere because we felt it might look like I was trying to curry favour, claiming to be related to the “Chosen One” and I didn’t want anyone to know until you had found out, until I knew how you felt about being related to me.”

Snape looked around the room to see how his audience were taking his tale, and seeing that they were following his words carefully continued.

“I didn’t just accept it easily you know. When Hermione first told me I scoffed at her. I dismissed this Muggle stuff as inconclusive, but a few days later my mother came to visit me and. ... eventually...she told me everything.”

Severus stopped for a moment, this was very painful for him and he hoped they understood, because for Severus it felt that so much of his life had been a lie. Growing up he had been so lonely, he had longed for someone, anyone that would be a playmate and like him for himself, and all along in another part of the country there had been Lily, his sister.

No one said a word whilst he gathered himself, and finally after several moments he felt able to continue.

The day that Eileen Prince had come to visit him had turned his life upside down and he thought of it now and it hurt. She had come into his cell as usual, bustling a bit as she tended to do and he had asked her, straight out in the blunt way that she had always encouraged.

“Mother. Do I have a sister?”

Eileen had been searching in the copious carpetbag that she always carried for the treats she had brought for her son when she froze at his question.

“Severus dear,” she said softly. “I don’t know what you mean.”

And Severus knew at once that she was lying because when she said this his loving, caring mother had refused to meet his eyes. She did know what he was talking about, of course she knew. He had a sister, because it had to be a sister, he was not related to James. Hermione had only mentioned mitochondrial DNA which apparently came from the mother, and Lily was supposedly related to him so closely that the evidence was virtually incontestable

“Mother.” He said warningly “please don’t lie to me I know that I had a sister, please tell me the truth”

“Oh love,” she said, “I am sorry, so very sorry.” She leaned forward and stroked his cheek with such tenderness that he was nearly undone and without further ado she told him everything

“My father was a drunkard and a bully,” Severus carried on, shaking his head a little to clear the memories. “Just after Mother brought me home from the hospital, maybe a week or so, he got drunk one night and beat her so badly she could hardly move, and then he forced himself upon her.”

Severus couldn't quite bring himself to say the word "rape" it was too stark, too violent although of course that is what it was. "She fell pregnant." He continued, "and seven and a half months later she gave birth to my sister. Mother was terrified. Father had grown increasingly more violent and abusive, she despaired of keeping me safe from him never mind herself so when she was two months pregnant she contacted the only person she thought who might be able to help; my father's sister Rosemary.

"Rosemary hated Tobias and they never spoke, she lived at the other end of England, she already had a daughter Mother said, but there had been complications at the birth and she couldn't have more children. Rosemary knew Tobias for what he was and she agreed to take the baby. So when she was born, Rosemary came to see Mother when my father was not around.

"They had to be careful, he hadn't to see what was going on because he probably would have killed them both and then killed the child. So they were very careful, Rosemary stayed away from her family and as close to mother as she could for several months and it was her's and her husband's name put on the birth certificate. Nobody except my mother, my aunt and my aunt's husband ever knew what had really happened.

"Mother never saw her daughter again. The little girl grew up happily, Mother said. Sometimes, in secret my aunt would send Mother photographs and little notes of my sister's progress. She treasured them, but she hid them away because if my father had known he would have gone mad!

"Mother told me that my aunt's husband was called George Evans and that they already had a daughter Petunia, and that Rosemary had insisted that Mother choose a name her child as they would have no contact from then on. So she named her after her favourite flower, she called her Lily. Lily Eileen Evans."

Severus stopped again for a bit, to gather himself, and while he did the room was completely still. His audience were waiting patiently for him to continue. They were not making a sound, but were looking upon him with such sympathy that he did not quite know what to do. Severus did not realise that all the time he had been talking tears had been flowing unchecked down his pale cold cheeks.

He was trembling now, and then before he could do or say anything Minerva was sitting beside him. She was holding his hand and smiling her encouragement through her tears

"She didn't tell me," Severus whispered, "she didn't tell me because of what I had become."

"When I was a child it was too dangerous for me to know. He had a way of getting things out of me, my father did. Mother had planned to tell me when I was seventeen. But...."

Severus was choking on the words; he could not seem to say them. He was shaking and could not seem to still his trembling. He swallowed several times and then found a glass of water pressed into his hands; he looked up to see Ron standing above him.

"Just whisper it," He said, kindly with understanding in his eyes, "under your breath"

So Severus did

"I became a Death Eater!"

Then all at once the words were tumbling out again with no stopping them and Severus was telling them about school and how he and Lily had been drawn to one another.

"But not in *that* way, there was no sexual attraction between us. Somehow we just felt comfortable in each other's company. I feel I should have known though. Because Lily loved

potions too, because she always supported me, even when I was being stupid, and those green eyes of hers, those lovely green eyes.

“Mother’s eyes are green too, just not that shade. Not the iridescent emerald that Lily’s eyes were. I loved her eyes they were so expressive, so beautiful, that’s one of the reasons I hated you so much Potter.” Snape said glaring at Harry as he spoke, as if he had done this deliberately.

“Because you have her eyes, in his face and it is too much of a reminder of what he took from me.

“I loved her like a sister, she was my only real friend at school and I was difficult, a challenge to have around but when I behaved badly she constantly forgave me. We rowed of course, we rowed a lot, but we always made it up in the end. But when she started dating James I stopped speaking to her. I hated him so much that I returned her notes, ignored her, refused to speak.

“Two weeks after their relationship started I finally decided that I would join Voldemort because Muggles could not be trusted, look at my father, look at what my Muggle born *friend* Lily had done. That was the justification I used. I was so angry. So full of hate, that I overcame the last of my doubts and joined the Dark Lord.

I never spoke to Lily again.”

Severus took some time to calm down again after this revelation, Harry left for a while, intending to check on his children he’d said but promising to return. Not that Severus believed him of course. He knew that Harry was disgusted by him and would not be quick to come back, if he ever returned at all

It was Draco that helped him regain control; he sat beside Severus and drew gentle comforting circles on his back with one hand. Where had he learned to do that Severus wondered? How did he know it would be so soothing?

“I’ve been here for a while.” Draco said, “I’m sorry for listening, but now I know, I am here for you Severus. I came to talk to you but I did not want to see Harry or have Harry see me for that matter. It’s not hard to hide from him you just need to remain out of his line of sight and he doesn’t even know that you are there.”

Severus did not quite know what to say. Why on earth was Draco hiding from Potter? Did he really think Potter hated him that much; surely the only one that justified such hatred was Severus himself?

The two men sat in silence for a while. Each wrapped up tightly in his own thoughts.

But then the door of Severus’ chambers opened again and in came Harry. Severus turned to Draco to say something but Draco seemed to have melted back into the shadows again, and Harry was speaking so Severus put Draco’s worries to the back of his mind for a while and listened to what his nephew was saying.

“I stopped by the kitchen for some refreshments, it seems to me that you need a little nourishment.” Harry said, laying the tray of goodies that he carried on the table in front of them and sitting down. Iona had returned with Harry, but McGonagall and Ron had tactfully taken themselves somewhere else. They obviously did not want to be around when Harry exploded at him. Wherever they were Harry was evidently not expecting their return at any time soon though because there were only three cups on the tray.

“Are you feeling any better?” Harry asked him, green eyes shining with - was that concern? Harry

Potter was worried about Severus Snape? Well that would all stop when he finished his story when Potter knew what Severus had truly done. So Severus carried on with his tale, the next few facts were so dreadful that Severus did not try to sugar coat them. How could he after all? There really was nothing he could say that would excuse his complicity.

“It was my fault your mother died.” Severus said. “I went to Voldemort and told him the prophecy. That’s what made him kill your parents, I caused the death of my own sister and it was my fault that you were raised by your dreadful uncle and aunt.” He almost flinched when he said that, because he knew that what he had done was something that Harry could not forgive, how could he, as Severus was unable to forgive himself?

“I know that you told him the prophecy Professor, I have known it since the night Dumbledore died.” Harry’s voice was calm, “But you did not cause the death of my parents. You like me were just doing as you were told. Voldemort killed my parents and *if* anyone else is to blame then it was not you but Dumbledore.”

Severus went completely white, all the blood drained from his face and he thought he was going to faint.

“How? What? How did you...?”

Severus was bewildered; he simply could not speak properly any more, construct a sentence even. How did Potter know? He stared at the boy. No, the man, that Po...that *Harry* had become, in total astonishment. And Harry unflinchingly stared coolly back

“It took me a long time to work it out, but then I was a long time in that cellar! I saw Trelawney the night that Dumbledore died I was on my way to warn him about Malfoy.”

Severus was distracted for a sec. But only momentarily, because Harry was speaking again.

“When I ran in to her she told me that it had been you that had overheard the prophecy that night, along with a lot of guff about how Dumbledore saw through you and how rude you were. For a long time I hated you Professor. But then, I have never been the brightest button in the box!” He said depreciatingly. “Without help that Remus said Hermione gave me, I had to work things out for myself.

“There was something puzzling me though,” Harry continued even looking rather puzzled as he explained things. “If you heard all of the prophecy, or even just the last bit then why did you only tell Voldemort the first few lines? Just enough of it so that he would seek me out? Just enough for him to fulfil the second part and *mark me as his equal*. Why would a loyal Death Eater do that? Why risk giving his master competition? I thought about it for a long time. It just didn’t make sense and then I realised that the only people that would get any benefit from Voldemort marking someone as his equal were those who were fighting against him.

“Dumbledore was desperate. He knew that Voldemort was creating Horcruxes, and was aiming to become immortal. He knew how powerful Tom Riddle had become, how ruthless he was. Tom Marvolo Riddle was a psychopath, pure and simple.” Harry looked at Iona, seemingly seeking confirmation of what he was saying; when she nodded he carried on.

“Psychopaths have no moral responsibility you see. They know what they are doing is wrong but they simply don’t care. They have no conscience. Dumbledore knew that he had to stop him; he was the only one who had all the knowledge, the only one who *could* prevent him from taking over the world.

“So he blackmailed you didn’t he Professor? He promised to protect you, as Death Eaters were

becoming ever more reviled and the danger was rising. You never really belonged with them anyway did you and you already regretted your involvement? I had already worked out that it was mostly some sort of spite against my father and Sirius that had motivated you to join him in the first place, and you wanted out didn't you? So that was the price albeit unknown to you both at that time. The price for his defeat was my family

"Oh I know that Dumbledore did not know what the outcome of his plotting would be, neither of you did. He was desperate, people were dying every day and he had to do something and this prophecy must have seemed like his only hope, sent by providence, sent by God.

"He didn't think anything of seeing Trelawney that night, he felt sorry for her perhaps. It was you he was there to see wasn't it Professor? He was killing time waiting for you. But when she made the prophecy it must have seemed like the answer to his prayers.

"So when you barged in to Trelawney's interview, Aberforth kept you there at the inn. Because wasn't that who the barman of the Hog's Head was, Albus' brother? He knew he was safe there, why else he risk interviewing you in a place like that? He was safer there than anyone else. He bound you to him somehow and he sent to back to Tom to tell him what Dumbledore needed him to know to provide impetus to his downfall.

"But neither of you knew how Tom would mark his equal and by the time you did. Well by then Havoc had been cried, and it was too late to bring back the dogs of war.

"I think what happened to my parents and to me was Dumbledore's greatest regret. But events had been set in motion by then and however hard he tried there was nothing he could do and just like you Professor I don't think he ever quite got over his guilt."

When Draco awoke he was too sore to move. His neck was stiff and his back ached! Why in the hell Severus still had this great heap of a horsehair sofa he really didn't know. It had been covered in nubbly green tweed, several years ago now though, someone who obviously hated his fellow man, so Draco suspected anyway, had chosen the combination. He had transfigured it many times in the past into either a more comfortable or pleasing piece of furniture but it resisted such beautification and always reverted to form at the most inconvenient moment. In that Draco supposed, it was very like the man who owned it, contrary and downright cantankerous.

He had not been able to leave Severus last night, as his godfather had been too upset to be on his own. Draco had put him to bed, whilst Severus had muttered under his breath about Potter, and how dare he? And who could have guessed he would be like that?

Severus seemed unable to cope with the fact that Harry had forgiven him.

Completely and without reservation, with no caveat or promises extracted, ignoring all the wrong deeds Severus insisted that he had done to him over the years Harry Potter had forgiven Severus Snape.

Draco had sat in the corner of Severus sitting room last night and listened unashamedly to the discussion that the two men had held late into the night. Iona had looked at him strangely a couple of times, but as Severus seemed to be doing nothing about him, she finally just ignored his presence and Draco was glad to be ignored.

Severus had been astounded at Harry's words

"Don't you care about what happened? Don't you care that you grew up with out a family? That

you grew up with those fucking Muggles?"

Then it had been Harry's turn to explode at Severus

"Of course I bloody care you stupid bastard." He'd bellowed back

"Do you think I *like* what happened to me?

"I have been manipulated since before I was even born, used as a weapon. I never had a childhood, because I couldn't stay with anyone in the wizarding world could I? Not after what had happened to the Longbottoms. No one would have wanted to take in someone who could bring such danger to their family, and I was a danger wasn't I? Dumbledore *knew* I was.

"Because he also knew that Voldemort wasn't dead, that he would come back and that nowhere would be completely safe then, that wasn't bathed in the blood of my mother's sacrifice.

And how do you think I feel about that?

"And yeah, Severus, I've worked it out. You are my uncle, my closest living relative, closer to my mother than Aunt Petunia who it turns out was only her cousin after all. If we had known that I could have lived with you. And that would have been so much better!"

"I would have taken you Harry," Severus had said softly turning Harry to face him as he spoke, "you are my family, the only family I have. I have to believe that if I had known the truth I would have been able to see through your resemblance to James, and that we could have come to some sort of understanding of each other...."

"Professor!" Harry said sharply, cutting him off. "Even if you had not changed your attitude one whit, one iota, you would have been better than they were to me. You would not have beaten or starved me or shoved me in a cupboard. You at least would not have sold me to Voldemort!"

Harry had been pacing, back and forth all evening. Stopping only to watch Iona sign, or stare intently at Severus when he spoke. He didn't see Draco hiding in his corner, not all evening long. Not that Draco minded, he could have watched Harry move and talk all night. But Harry sat then and took Severus' long slim hands in his own square, roughened ones

"My family were.... what do the Americans call it? *Collateral damage*, and that's what you were too Professor. We were in the way of two opposing forces and that what happened to us was unfortunate, but there are always such casualties in the time of war are there not?" Harry sounded angry now, bitter and even the loyal Iona flinched when he spat out his next words.

"What happened to me was one of the reasons that I stayed away from the wizarding world. I could not face the way that I thought they would treat me when I returned, the conquering hero or the tragic cripple. I am neither, I am simply a man, who also happens to be a wizard," This last said rather wryly. "I am in truth a very powerful wizard and I did not want to take the risk, once my magic returned, of hexing someone into next week!" He grinned then, rather ruefully. "I have more control of myself now.

"I don't hate you, I did, for a long time I did. I didn't understand why you were so nasty to me as a child, but then I got to the stage that I didn't care anymore. You were kind to me when it mattered when I was Voldemort's prisoner, you gave me potions and touched me gently when you soothed my wounds and not many people in my life had touched me at all before then. You were there when I needed you and I won't forget that easily."

Severus was crying openly now. Severus Snape who in all the years Draco had known him had rarely shed a tear was sobbing like a baby.

“But I did so little, Hhharry, I wwwanted to take you away from there, they should not have treated you like that, you and Ddddraco. You were just children and....and it was so hard watching you suffer, both of you. In there I forgot whose son you were and how much I had disliked your fffather and I just saw you as a child, a frightened child....” Severus had completely broken down now. He was crying so hard that he could not speak. ““M sorry,” he sobbed “so sorry.”

“Its all right Sir.” Harry said. “Please don’t cry.” But Severus had not been able to stop himself. So Harry Potter, like the Gryffindor he was had crossed the divide between them, the barrier of hate and distrust that had proved more durable over the years than the bricks and mortar of Riddle Manor. He had taken his hated potions professor in his arms and held him until the sobs that wracked his body stilled and until he could speak again.

“I am not a child Potter, kindly unhand me,” Severus had snarled as he pushed himself away from Harry’s embrace. As soon as he had recovered himself well enough to do so.

“I wanted to apologise.” He said somewhat stiffly. “For my treatment of you over the years, for not getting you away from Voldemort sooner, for what happened to your parents, and to....Black.”

Harry smiled, the expression lighting up his face until Draco nearly melted with the beauty of him. “S’okay Professor, “it’s all forgotten.n” this time waving a hand in dismissal

Then Severus, more agitated. “You don’t understand Potter. I wanted to say I am sorry, if you knew the things that I have done, th...”

Harry interrupting Severus once again “No *you* don’t understand. I know what you did. I know everything. All the stuff that you are guilt tripping over. If I could forgive Dumbledore for what he did to me, to my family and I *have* forgiven him. Don’t you think I could forgive you too? It’s done, finished, finito, forgotten, in the past. You get a “get out jail free card” Professor.

I forgive you. For everything.”

Harry had left soon after that, telling Severus to get some sleep, as he would be taking him to meet his great nephews and nieces in the morning.

But it was a long time before Severus was ready to sleep; he and Draco sat up for a long time and talked. Severus told Draco how awful he had been when he was spying for Dumbledore and how sorry he was that he had not forcibly taken Draco away. That he had let Voldemort take him, but Draco had shushed him.

“I probably wouldn’t have listened,” Draco said, “I was a dreadful little snot back then and thought you were just out for glory.

“I deserved what happened to me.”

“No *you* did not,” said Severus forcefully, he seemed appalled. “No one deserves what happened to you. You were a child; you did nothing to deserve such treatment Draco. Nothing at all. Do you hear me?”

Draco hung his head

Then he nodded once sadly and looked away.

Severus put his hand under his godson’s chin and lifted his face up gently. What’s going on with you and Potter, Draco,” he asked, “why are you avoiding him?”

Draco pulled back none too gently, “nothing,” he said, “there’s nothing going on and shouldn’t you be calling him Harry, now that you know you’re related?”

“Draco Lucius Malfoy, do not try to change the subject. I have known you. Tell me what is going on with you and *Harry* and tell me NOW!”

Draco gulped

Severus was obviously not in the mood for any excuses so Draco told him everything.

How he had fallen in love with Harry down in that awful cellar and how Harry it seemed, had fallen for him too. He told Severus how Harry had saved his sanity and how all these years he had somehow managed to stay alive because he hoped deep down that Harry was still alive and that they could one day be together.

“But look at him Sev, he is so strong, so together. Why would he want me? I can’t even walk properly, I am used up and tired out, on the scrap heap at 29!”

And Severus did look, He looked at the man that Draco had become. This young man, his godson had overcome so much to still be here. And he was so proud of him that he hardly knew what to say.

Many people would have been destroyed by what had happened to him, but Draco had picked himself up and albeit with a number of setbacks and disasters had carried on living. He had not realised how much the boys had helped each other and did not recall ever seeing them together. In fact when he thought about it he did not recall seeing Draco much at all in the last couple of weeks that they had been prisoners and indeed he was rather shocked to realise that he had forgotten him. So that is what Harry had done? A blanket notice-me-not, which he rather suspected Draco now utilised against Harry himself to facilitate his pursual of the man he loved.

“Oh Draco,” he’d said, when Draco finally finished his tale. “You must speak to him. Despite all I thought of him when you were at school I think he will be kind to you and listen to you. If only we could restore his memories somehow!”

“Don’t you understand Sev?” Draco said, his voice breaking with sadness.

“I don’t want his kindness, I want him to remember *me!* To love me for what I am. But how can he after all that I have done? All that I have been? I don’t want his pity. I deserve more than that. Pity would destroy me. Oh Severus I want his love, I just want to be loved by the man who captured my heart when I was just seventeen-years-old.”

Part Six

PART SIX - SEEKING WHAT WAS HIDDEN

Severus was determined that things would change for Draco. He would change them. After all was he not a master at *Occlumency*? If anyone could restore Potter's memories, overcome brain damage then surely it would be him. It would also, he mused, allow him to do something for the young man who had been so generous the night before.

Severus could not understand Harry. He had held on to his own grudges for many years, nursed them, nurtured them. But not Harry. Oh no, he had waved his away like thistledown and Severus did not like being in anyone's debt.

Especially not a Potter's.

But then he reminded himself; Harry was not just a Potter was he? He was a Snape as well. Because even if he had been raised as a Muggle, Severus sneered to himself, by his *cousin* Petunia, he was related to Severus by blood. Severus had known that for some time now, for years and when Potter had not been around he could live with it. Be, if not happy about it, at least satisfied with the fact that he did have some family left apart from his mother.

But the blasted man just looked so much like his father, and Severus had disliked *him* for long enough! He would work on his resentment he promised himself, and keep working on it, perhaps if Harry met Eileen? Perhaps if Severus got to know the children? And he would definitely offer *Occlumency* as an option.

He had also neglected his godson for too long now he realised and Draco was suffering. Maybe there was something that they could do with his leg? Draco told them it had been broken in a fight when he lived in the Muggle world. It had had healed wrongly and had been disfigured for so long that it seemed even magic could not cure it. But perhaps there was some way? He was a Potions expert after all.

Maybe the Lenoir Foundation would require additional Potions research and Severus could enlist Draco to help him more often than he did now? They were very generous with funding and Draco could undoubtedly use the extra money. That would help Severus thought. Let the boy utilise some of his outstanding talent in Potions, that would remind him how able he was in a way that Hagrid's old post did not. There were indeed some interesting possibilities he told himself, he had left Draco to recover on his own for long enough.

And maybe he could get to meet that Iona woman properly? He had initially thought that she was Harry's wife, but Draco had told him that she had died several years earlier, and of course now that Severus thought about it he realised that Iona had been somewhat older than Harry. There were laughter lines around her eyes for a start and a touch more grey than the average thirty-year-old woman tended to. Perhaps he would run into her later?

So, tired, but filled with a new determination to get things sorted out for both the young men that he now felt somewhat responsible for, Severus Snape went in search of a late breakfast in a fairly equitable mood.

Draco on the other hand was not having a good day. He was still stiff from his uncomfortable night on the sofa. He had left that morning without seeing Severus again as the man had still been asleep when he had had to get up to feed the animals. Severus had been really rambling by the

time Draco had finally gotten him to sleep. Draco had known at the time that the whisky had been a mistake, but Severus had insisted. Draco just knew that Severus would be grumpy later on which did not bode well for the brewing they had to do later.

And Harry's children were there again.

They had taken to following him around. It had all started just a couple of days earlier. Harry was inundated with visitors all the time these days. There were crowds at the gates and Daily Prophet reporters hanging around waiting for a glimpse of the Chosen One, The Saviour, as he was now known. Most of the visitors so far had been friends, those sympathetic to Harry but today the Minister himself planned to come for a visit after apparently receiving no answer to his owls. The interest showed no signs whatsoever of dying down and Harry had been at Hogwarts for four days now. It was Draco's job to keep the uninvited out and this was proving ever more difficult as their numbers increased.

The first time he had seen the children they had come up to him en masse and had asked him whether he were an elf. Draco had realised that he did look a bit down at heel these days but was surprised and shocked to be taken for a house elf, maybe Harry's children had not met any yet and just assumed that that was what he was?

"No," he had answered politely, mustering his dignity as best he could, because after all these were Harry's children and he did not want to be cross with them. "I am Draco Malfoy Keeper of Keys, here at Hogwarts pleased to meet you all," he said formally holding out his hand. The children looked at each other and giggled and took it in turns to solemnly shake hands with him. There were five of them in all. Ranging from the red haired child whom Draco had seen on the first day whose name was Flora, to a very small boy who must have been the image of his father at that age whose name was Finn.

"I fink you look like an elf." Said the smallest girl (who was apparently called Caitriona) shyly "I fink you are Legolas, you are so beautiful."

Draco was astonished. He was probably one of the very few pure born wizards in the world who even knew what the children were talking about. He was rather fond of the Lord of the Rings films himself and remembered one particular occasion when he had managed to stay out of the rain and cold for a whole day tucked away at the back of the cinema whilst Peter Jackson spun a very special kind of magic for his audience and Draco at least had been spell bound. He had been living rough when he saw the films and the story and magnificent filming had for a while reminded him of what he had once been and had truly made him feel happy for a while.

So he crouched down to look kindly at the child "You think I look like Legolas do you? That's very kind of you but I am not as handsome or as graceful as he is."

"Yes you are," said the little girl hotly, tossing back her own blonde locks as she spoke, "You are the most beautiful elf in the whole world." And she reached out a small hand to gently stroke his hair. "Will you be our elf?"

Draco felt tears pick the back of his eyes.

"That is very sweet of you to say Caitriona," Draco said in a tight voice. "I thank you for your kindness milady." And he graciously bowed his head to her making her giggle again.

"Its not just Caitie that thinks that," put in the eldest boy, "we all do. Flora saw you first, but she said she would share you with us. Will you be our friend?" And as he said that the third boy, who was so like his sister Caitie in size and looks that Draco wondered if he might be a twin put his little hand in Draco's and squeezed his finger tightly

“Pwease?” He asked smiling up a gappy smile.

“Of course I will,” said Draco, “as long as Granny and Daddy don’t mind that is.”

“Oh they won’t,” said Flora, “I know they won’t. If they say yes can we come back and help you?”

Apparently they did say yes because the children had returned within the hour running and skipping towards him insisting on helping lay out the hay for the Thestrals and weeding the pumpkin patch with more enthusiasm than skill. But from then onwards, despite his protests, they had refused to call him anything but Legolas.

Today though he had too much to do to be able to play with children, so he turned apologetically to Flora,

“I am sorry my dear children” he said, “but I am really busy, the Minister for Magic is coming later and the grounds really need a bit of tidying up and the animals all need feeding before he gets here.”

“Oh we know about him,” said Flora confidentially. “Dad calls him a pompous old wind bag! But don’t tell anyone I told you as Granny says that we’re not to be rude about grown ups, even when they are pompous.

“ We probably have to go and meet him too as Dad keeps introducing us to all these folk and we’re getting a bit tired of it all to be honest!” I mean some of them are nice or funny like Ginger Bear’s brothers but some of them are really boring and will keep on giving us kisses and things and saying how much I look like my Granny Lily!” She looked thoroughly indignant and Draco had to bite his lip not to laugh.

“And how much me and Finn look like my Dad!” Said Rory rolling his eyes

“And how very pretty Calum and Caitie are.” Flora said. “But you do look a bit tired today Legolas.” She continued, looking closely at him, “so I am going to take you inside and make you a nice cup of tea, whilst the others get started on feeding the animals.”

And without more ado, she did.

After breakfast Severus went to search for, well anyone really. He felt rather strange after the night before. The thought that Ron or that Iona had seen him so upset made him cringe inside. Severus had fought long and hard throughout his life to retain his barriers, that was how he had finally managed to push Lily away. He was a proudly independent man; he had distanced himself from almost everyone and would far rather be alone than be pitied. Only two people had ever really seen through his façade before, one had been Eileen, who could always read her son’s moods and the other, why the other was Albus. Father figure, mentor, master manipulator, Severus could never hide anything from him.

In the past he would have avoided those present the previous evening or been deliberately nasty in order to push them away, but he found he couldn’t quite do that now. He probably could have with Iona, and although he quite liked her he would undoubtedly be rather frosty in demeanour towards her for the immediate future at least. But with Ron, Severus found he could not quite bear to lose his friendship, not now. He had come to care for the young Weasley couple almost as much as he cared for Draco, so it was a rather subdued Severus that joined Hermione and Iona in the staff room sometime later.

“Hi Severus, how are you?” Hermione asked kindly

“Fine thank you Mrs Weasley, “Never better in fact,” Severus answered formally

“Oh Sev!” Hermione snorted. “Stop being such a pompous old windbag!” She put out a long slim hand and pulled him down to the chair next to her

“Iona and I are trying to decide what to do about Harry,” she said in the rather bossy way that had once irritated him beyond belief but that he now found rather endearing. “We need to help him Severus, he needs to remember...

Suddenly the door burst open and Ron exploded through it

“I have had enough,” he shouted “I have fucking had it with those bastards!! I have absolutely and utterly had it.”

Ron was pacing the floor, he was shaking, raking his hands angrily through his hair. Severus had not seen him so angry in a long time and wondered what on earth was going on

“I’m sorry, hon.” Ron said, looking at Hermione in chagrin. “But I told Kingsley to stuff his job today. I simply cannot do it any more.” His voice seemed to crack.... “They have passed a law Scrimgeour and Umbridge that any dark creature, but specifically werewolves, if caught trying to harm a human, can be put to sleep. This is what really pisses me off! They can be put down ‘like rabid dogs’ DOGS!!!

“The legislation says, ‘if caught trying to harm humans.’ How woolly is that? It could mean anything, it means that no-one is safe anymore.

“What the fuck have we come to if we can treat human beings, our fellow magical creatures like this? What the fuck does Harry think he is bringing his children back here for? It can’t be for this, surely not for this?”

And Ron, who had been so strong for them all over the last few years, sat heavily on the chair next to Severus and buried his face in his hands.

“This world is going to hell in a hand-basket and I can’t seem to stop it! He said, “Kingsley said I should hang on because maybe we could change things from the inside, but I can’t, not anymore. Everyone is so scared. Too scared to move against Umbridge or Scrimgeour and there is talk of her reinstating the inquisition squad, only obviously with far more powers than her little group of supporters at Hogwarts ever had.

“I can’t work there any more Hermione, I don’t want people thinking I support what they are doing to our world, hell, I *don’t* support it. It stinks of bullying and corruption and no one seems prepared to stop things or oppose them and I just don’t know what to do anymore.”

“Surely Harry can do something?” Hermione said “He can speak to Scrimgeour when he sees him later, he’ll listen to Harry.”

“I don’t think he will love, have you seen the Daily Prophet today?” This last said with a quirk of the eyebrow

When they all shook their heads he produced it from one of his capacious pockets with a flourish.

“Right, well then, I shall read it to you,” and he began.

Harry Potter – Damaged Beyond Repair?

It has come to this reporter's notice, after several reports from those who have seen him that Harry Potter stayed away from the magical world because his injuries from the final battle were so severe, that he was so badly injured in the final battle that it is likely that he will never recover.

Those who have seen Potter have attested that he is a shadow of his former self. Harry didn't seem to know us, said his close friend from school Lavinia Brown. He smiled at us in a welcoming way but had no idea who we were. It was quite heart-breaking for those who knew him so well.

Others say that his girlfriend from Hogwarts days Hermione Grosvenor now Mrs Winterbottom is distraught and being comforted by her husband Raymond. Harry suffered severe brain damage said close friend and favourite teacher from those days Dolores Umbridge. Ms Umbridge's eyes filled with tears as she spoke of a man once beloved to her as a pupil, broken by service to his country.

Harry is not alone however, his Muggle family accompany him everywhere and translate what is being said to him into simple language that he can understand.

Mr Potter it is believed is at Hogwarts so that his daughter Flossie can attend in September. Her mother who died recently raised Flossie, unfortunately it is believed that Potter is unable to care for his daughter himself.

It was Severus's turn to lose his temper this time.

“That is outrageous!” He bellowed, “How dare they? We must go and find Harry. This drivel must be retracted. Harry does not deserve to be slandered like this.

“I was going to suggest Legilimency as a way perhaps of returning Harry's memories but with slurs such as this being printed we need to act more quickly. We need to protect him from this!”

Neither Ron or Hermione or Severus noticed Iona slip away at this point in the discussion. Nor did they notice that she did not seem in the remotest bit upset about the article on Harry.

They found Harry in the entrance hall when they finally went looking for him. They had talked about what to do, how best to persuade Harry to let Severus try to restore his memory. Hermione told Ron that she was proud of him for standing up to tyrants like Umbridge and Scrimgeour and insisted that they would manage financially until he could find something else. She also promised that she would start work on a charm that would help Harry so that he could understand what was being said without having to have anyone translate for him. Then she had turned to ask Iona her opinion and had realised that the woman must have left whilst their attention was elsewhere.

But Iona was with Harry. Her arm was linked with his, she was signing with one hand, slowly as if she were stressing the importance of something.

She turned when Hermione called her name and Harry turned also, smiling when he saw who had come looking for them.

“Morning all!” He said. “How are you Professor, ready to meet the kids later? I'm afraid I have a meeting with Scrimgeour any time now, so it will have to be after lunch if that is okay?”

“Harry!” Hermione gasped, “Are you all right?”

“Um, yeah? Why wouldn't I be?”

We have just seen the Prophet today and oh Harry there is this article about you, it implies that

you are very injured Harry, brain damaged, unable to look after your kids. It's horrible Harry."

"Its okay Hermione I've seen it, don't worry it really doesn't matter!"

"But Harry..."

Just then the large, ornate front doors of Hogwarts swung open and in walked Rufus Scrimgeour. He was garbed in deeply embroidered purple robes, thick leonine hair neatly coifed, and behind him as pinkly primped and toad like as ever Dolores Umbridge.

Her eyes raked over the hall, taking everything in, evaluating, calculating weighing up what she could destroy. Her eyes locked with Severus' and she smiled. But whereas Harry's smile had been open and welcoming hers was cold, hungry calculating. She had been at Hogwarts for less than a year, such a long time ago now. She had obviously had much bigger fish to fry since then. But there was something, something about the way that she greedily drank in the surroundings of the school that made Severus's blood run cold.

"Harry," Hermione whispered urgently, "*Harry*

Harry put a finger to his lips

"Sshhh." He said and he gave them a small secret smile and winked

Then he hunched his shoulders, opened his mouth ever-so-slightly which gave him a rather vacant look and leaning heavily on Iona's support shuffled slowly and painfully over to greet the Minister and his depute.

Severus did not know what to say, the problem was that he and Harry really did not know each other at all. It had been fine earlier with the children present or when Ron or Hermione were with them, but the difficulty was that Severus had hated him for such an extensive period and had obviously misunderstood him for such a long time that..... Well where did you start a conversation with the hated son of your worst childhood enemy who also happened to be your nephew? Severus didn't think any of those self-help manuals that Muggles were so fond of covered it somehow.

One or two phrases came to mind, but he dismissed them.... "*well you seem to have recovered from all that torture pretty well.*" or "*Draco is madly in love with you and I think he will fall apart, messily, very soon if you don't notice him and try to help him.*" or even "*Sorry I was such a shit to you all those years.*" Hadn't they sort of covered that last night after all?

He thought about asking Harry what was going on with Scrimgeour and Umbridge, because Harry was obviously playing up to the prejudices of the odious pair, and encouraging them to dismiss him. But he rather doubted Harry would tell him. As far as he could see Harry, whom he had always thought to be the archetypal Gryffindor, was acting in a way that was positively Slytherin.

But then Severus thought, Harry had been showing Slytherin tendencies for quite some time hadn't he? He had concealed his magical abilities from them all, not just Voldemort. And his childhood! Merlin knew how he had managed to conceal what it had truly been like for him with those Muggles. Yet he had never revealed the details to anyone. Yes Severus mused, Harry certainly had his Slytherin side. You would tell him to do something and he would look at you steadily, with those green eyes of his, agree that it was the best thing to do and then carry on with whatever he was doing anyway, according to his own secret plans that he shared with nobody.

Except perhaps the enigmatic Iona

Harry was standing in Severus' sitting room - the scene of so much angst the night before and clutching a cup of tea. He checking out the books on the shelves, Severus noted that he was standing right where Draco had been just a few hours earlier.

Finally Harry turned around to look at him and Severus spoke

“So,” he said, “Iona seems nice?” Severus cringed, oh my god he thought, I sound so pathetic, could I not have thought of anything better than that? I sound like somebody’s mother at a bloody tea party!

But Harry didn’t seem to mind, he tilted his head to one side and said

“She is, if it were not for her, goodness knows where I would be today. She is a psychologist, a sort of Muggle mind healer. She has always been there for me, she has helped so much. I really don’t know what I would have done without her you know? Because there was a time that I could barely cope. I had panic attacks and screaming nightmares and....”

He broke off for a moment.

“She must be very good at what she does Harry, Severus said softly, “because you are a remarkable young man. I do not think there are many people who could have gone through what you have gone through and come out the other side as well has you have.”

Harry looked at him in consideration.

“Do you know Professor, I think that is probably the nicest thing you have ever said to me? Thanks I guess! But an awful lot of how okay I am now is down to Fi, and my kids and of course Iona.

“She came with me here because I was not sure how it would be. When I got back. I mean, I’m mostly okay these days, very few flashbacks. But we thought...we both thought that being here might trigger something, memories, but there is nothing. Old Tom did a good job on my brain. No wonder Iona says I am her *Magnum Opus*!

“You know what’s worse though?” He was looking directly into Severus’ eyes, “That I have to keep hurting people.” They all seem so happy to see me and I have to disappoint them because I have not got a clue who they are for the most part.

“Ron and Hermione were the worst I think, because although I at least knew who they were from Remus’ stories. I didn’t actually know them. I don’t really remember them at all and, well I think they are used to it now but, I could see the hurt in their eyes at first. Do you know what I mean?

Sometimes I get these feelings about people; some people anyway, I get them about Ron and Hermione, a sort of warmth, a tenderness. Like shadows in my mind.”

“Do you remember me, Harry?” Severus asked

“Harry snorted. “Of course I do Professor, It was my good memories that Voldemort destroyed, and I am sorry Sir, but none of my memories of you count as good!”

Severus, unaccountably felt rather hurt at that.

“Oh!” He said

“Well,” Harry said, looking at his watch, “will we get on with the *Legilimency* then Professor? I promised the children that I would be there for tea-time.

“Do you want me sitting.... or,”

“Sitting will be fine. You can trust me you know Harry.”

Harry’s eyes met Severus’s again and held his gaze.

“I know that Professor. If I didn’t trust you I wouldn’t be here,” and then as if he sensed how strangely fragile Severus was feeling right now, “I really do want me and the children to get to know you better. Are you joining us for tea? I think Rory really took to you and we would love to have you?”

Severus just nodded rather stiffly and with that Harry took the seat that his uncle indicated and they began

“*Legilimens.*”

Severus found himself wandering in Harry’s mind. The memories danced around him, flashes of light in a dream landscape. A wild moorland scene, close to the sea. Harry, throwing a stick for a bouncing dog and running with children.... A blonde haired woman smiling... Children laughing...., a sobbing Fi being held... the blonde woman again covered in perspiration, laughing and holding up a tiny newborn in a sunny bedroom.... Ron and Hermione, turning towards him and smiling...., returning to Hogwarts...

Older memories now... being chased by a dog with people laughing, flying away from a dragon. Severus himself shouting at a much younger Harry. Walking into a Muggle lounge and seeing Walden MacNair and three other men. Sirius Black falling through the veil...

He was being drawn into images faster and faster. It was an experience that he never got used to, and then suddenly it changed.

Fuzzy images this time, as if seen from behind tissue paper or a dark opaque curtain, blackened though, ugly. Voices muffled, heard as if from under water, lots of these, hundreds, almost indistinguishable from each other, going on and on.

Then horrible memories, thirst, hunger, pain. Oh God such awful pain! Cold. Loneliness. Aching despair. And then.... and then.

A barrier. Huge and impenetrable, made up of, was that thicket? Thorn and briar rose, hawthorn and bramble? But from somewhere beyond the impassable hedge Severus could sense something. Something so magical, so joyful, so special, that he was drawn to it like it was the most important place he could ever visit, like nowhere before or afterward could ever be so precious, he reached out his hand as if to touch it.... There was a blinding flash and Severus was no longer in Harry’s mind, but across the room, crumpled on the floor.

“Professor! Are you all right?” Harry’s voice said as if from a distance, but Severus closed his eyes, they felt so heavy and then he knew no more.

Severus' head felt like it was being pounded by sledge-hammers. He sat up and groaned.

"Oh Merlin!" He moaned

"Severus?" It was Hermione's voice

He gingerly opened one eye to see where she was. Where he was, come to that and saw that he was in his bedroom and that she was sitting beside his bed with a book resting in her lap.

"You have been unconscious for nearly twenty four hours, Sev." She said, " Try not to get up too quickly or you mind find yourself a bit dizzy."

"Wha...what happened?" He muttered

"We don't really know, you were practicing occlumency on Harry and the next he knew he was in tremendous pain and you had been thrown across the room. He was laid low with a headache himself for most of the rest of yesterday. He is just through in the kitchen making a cup of tea, I'll go get him. He's been really worried about you."

Severus tried to humpf at that but he was too sore to move so instead he just closed his eyes and lay back on the pillow.

"Are you all right Professor?" Harry said gently

"For Merlin's sake Harry I have just been in your head! Sharing your most intimate thoughts. Call me Severus! That is my name and you are an adult now!"

He winced again. Loud noises *hurt!*

Harry chuckled, "Pro..sorry Severus, you have been in my head a lot of times before and you never asked me to call you Severus then."

Severus humped, "No maybe not. But I didn't know you were my nephew then either," he cracked open an eye. "We've not had a good experience of occlumency together you and I eh?"

Harry chuckled then, a joyful, rather unexpected sound and Severus felt absurdly pleased with himself that he had managed to make Harry laugh.

"Same time, same place tomorrow?" he suggested

"Okay *Severus*, I'm game if you are." Harry replied.

"Fancy a cup of tea?"

Draco was quite distraught. He had seen Ginny Weasley-Zabini going up to the castle earlier and then a short while ago, Harry had walked her to the gate. He'd been chatting away with her arm in arm. He felt sick; maybe Harry wanted to be with her rather than him? Well why would he want Draco when he could have anyone else in the world that he possibly could want? Draco thought sadly. Didn't stop it hurting though, not one bit.

All in all Draco had not had a good week. The brewing project for the Lenoir foundation had not been going well, and Harry had spent much of his time closeted with Severus, so Draco had been working on his own and hadn't seen either of them or Ron or Hermione. Ron had left the auror service and seemed a bit out of sorts. He had gone to spend a day or so with his mother as

Hermione seemed ever-busier getting ready for the start of school.

Harry was still inundated with visitors, all queuing up to see if there was anything of substance in that Prophet article and Draco seemed to be spending more and more time with no-one else but the children for company and he was feeling left out, lonely and rather cross.

He was clearing weeds behind the green houses now, angry and frustrated and near to tears, and that was when Flora found him.

“Hi Legolas,” she said, “how are you today?”

“M’okay,” Said Draco shortly, he found that he was unaccountably annoyed with Flora. Deep down he knew that he should not be, that Flora was a sweet child, but no one else had come near him all day and he could not help himself snapping at her a bit.

“What do you want anyway? Can’t you see I’m busy?”

Flora did not really look like her father, she was it seemed an amalgam of her mother Mhairi and her granny Lily. But just then she tipped her head to one side and looked at Draco curiously and it was all that Draco could do not to cry out loud, for just for that moment Flora was the image of Harry.

Draco’s breath caught in his chest,

“Oh God!” He said “I’m so sorry Flora, I.I..I didn’t mean to snap!”

“S’okay,” said Flora, shrugging her small shoulders, “My Dad asked me to say to you that you should go and see him sometime. He has something that he wants to tell you and you are never around when he comes looking.”

“Bibble.” said Draco

Flora looked at him strangely

“Pardon?” She said

Draco cleared his throat, and tried again, “I’m a bit busy. It’s a bad time of year. Students will be here soon and I have to get the castle ready, and the grounds, and if I wait till the children get back they’ll be no time, and you kids keep coming down and bothering me when I am busy, and so then I get held back and....

“Legolas are you avoiding my Daddy?”

Draco blushed.

“No, no why would I want to do that?”

Flora smiled a sweet and rather knowing smile, “I think you like my Dad she said, you know fancy him, *like him, like him* ”

Draco was horrified. Flora knew? She had noticed how he felt? Oh God, this child knew about him? Not only that, but she had trivialised his love for Harry using some childish little girl term. Which cheapened it, made it seem like nothing at all, but his feelings were very real to Draco and he was getting to the stage where he just could not take much more pain.

Harry’s return had been pure torture for him, to see Harry every day from a distance and yet be

too terrified to say anything. Too scared to go close in case he was rejected. To stand by and watch the Lavender Brown's and Ginny Zabini's of the world stroll in and out of his company apparently with out a care in the world. He was fed up with being pitied, patronised, treated badly, hated, spat on and used. It had been too many years since Draco had been able to hold his head up high and he was completely and utterly fed up with being the butt of some elaborate cosmic joke and all that angst, all his hurt and sorrow that he had been carrying around for so long boiled over all at once into a huge and uncontrollable anger. And he turned that anger on the only person available at that moment in time he turned it on Flora.

"How dare you?" He shouted, "How dare you suggest that I am like some love sick school girl following after your father?"

Flora's grey eyes went wide with shock "I'm sorry," she stuttered "I..

But Draco interjected and cut off whatever she was about to say. "I do not 'fancy him', he is a man, a man who was married to your mother. He does not like men, he likes woman, and there is no way, no way on earth that he would like me! For Merlin's sake child can you not see that I am not some proud mystical elf? I am a broken down handy man, a fool and a whore. An old, dirty, washed up whore and that is all I will ever be!"

Flora stood still staring at him for several seconds mute with horror and panting hard. Then her eyes filled with tears and sobbing loudly she turned away from him and ran as fast as she could back to the castle.

And Draco, all anger spent, sank to his knees in the deepest sorrow. He knew that he should not have lost his temper like that, not at Flora, he had just lost her friendship and he realised at that moment how much he had come to treasure the company of the cheerful, helpful little girl.

"Oh Flora, I am so sorry," he whispered. "But you were wrong, I don't just fancy your father, I love him. I love him from the very depths of my soul, and I can't have him, can't be with him and the pain of it is tearing me apart."

Then Draco curled himself into as small a ball as he could manage in amongst the nettles and overgrown rhubarb and sobbed out his bitter despair.

Hermione was in her office; she had seemed not to leave at all these last few days. Finding Harry had seriously cramped her schedule. Not that she minded. It was so good to have him around again, and this Harry was very different from the person he had been at school. How could he not be? He had been through so much over the past few years but, as Fi had said Harry was a survivor, and this Harry was fun!

His mischievous streak, that had been barely apparent the last few years of school, was visible in full force now and he was great at cheering them all up. Especially with all that was going on this moment in time in the wizarding world. He made her laugh, and he teased Ron and even Severus. She treasured her visits with him and with his family. They were so sweet, so generous. They had embraced Severus into their midst with barely a second thought, he still seemed rather bewildered by it all, she decided. Severus and Iona seemed to be also getting on well. They both had quick minds and acerbic wit and seemed to be uniting over what to do about Harry! And Harry seemed to be quite happy to just sit back and let them get on with it.

She was a bit worried about Ron though. Her husband was usually an even tempered man, who suffered the occasional bouts of hot headed anger, but it was quick to cool, and despite a tendency to sulk in his teenage years Ron was on the whole was a fairly equitable man. But lately he

seemed to be constantly unsettled and worried about the state of the world. As each day passed there was another article about Harry and how unstable he was. Today's had even gone so far as to suggest that he should be taken to St Mungos for extended treatment. She had tried to get him to take them seriously but he had shrugged them off

“Don’t worry Hermione.” He had said, “I’ll be fine.”

Finally she was worried about Draco. She was sure that he was getting ill again. Like he had been when they had first brought him back to Hogwarts. He was hiding in the shadows all the time now, speaking only to the children. She was sure that all those years ago something had happened between him and Harry in those cellars, something more than the friendship he had told them about. But he refused to talk to her, seemed even to be avoiding her company. And as for Harry, he was hardly reliable. When questioned he looked at her with those big green eyes and said quite honestly that he didn’t remember. But she knew there was something, if only she could get to the bottom of it all.

She was just pondering whether she had managed to do enough paperwork to be allowed the treat of a cup of tea and a short walk to stretch her legs when her door slammed back and Ron literally fell into the room

“Oh shit Hermione!” said Ron, out of breath and clearly very upset about something, “Fucking, buggering, hell. You have to come now, quickly, Bill’s been arrested for being a dark creature, what the fuck are we going to do?”

Neither Harry nor Severus saw Flora watching them, she was very good at staying hidden when she wanted to be. She knew that her new uncle Severus was trying to get her dad’s memories back, and Flora wondered. She had seen the way her father looked at Draco, the two or three times that he had managed to catch sight of him that was! His expression seemed to soften somehow, become wistful. It was almost the way he looked at her and her brothers and sisters, almost and yet not quite the same. Flora knew that if she could only get them together then everything would somehow be all right.

She had not known why her Legolas had kept hidden from her father for so long. Because she had thought him the most beautiful thing that she had ever seen, from the very first moment she had caught sight of him hiding, watching them from the bushes. And then he had shouted those things at her and at first she had been hurt and angry. It had taken her a while to think things through but then she had understood!

When Flora was sad sometimes, Aunty Iona and she would watch films, old romantic weepies. They would sit with a big bowl of popcorn, slathered in honey and a box of tissues, snuggle together and watch sad, sloppy love stories. Outwardly she scorned such mush, but deep down, in secret, she loved her times with Iona. Times she wished she could have shared with her mother and would have done if Mum hadn’t died. Flora missed her mother, and she knew her dad did too, but she also knew that whilst Iona and Granny could fill much of the gap left by Mhairi’s death for her and her brothers and sister, they could not do that for her father.

Just like in those movies, *Sleepless in Seattle*, *Ghost*, *Notting Hill*, Dad was lonely and he needed someone to love. Draco had said that her father wouldn’t want him because he was a man and that he had been married to her mother and didn’t really like men. But Flora was more aware than Draco was of her father’s opinions on that, because of her granny’s brother Hector.

Hector came to visit often with his boyfriend David and sometimes people had said horrible things about them, especially that nasty Mary Morrison at the shop. But Daddy had said that some people

were just blinkered and narrow minded and thought it was wrong for two men or two women to love each other and could be mean about it. But he thought that love was never wrong whenever it occurred and should be welcomed by everyone because there was nowhere near enough of it in the world and it sometimes knew better than people themselves did about who should be together.

But Draco had been really distressed and had shouted at her that even worse than being a man he had been a whore. Flora had run away when he'd said that because it was such a horrible word and it frightened her a bit to hear it. Especially used by her Legolas against himself like that. So she had hidden from everyone for a while and cried a little bit, and then she thought of how upset Draco must have been to have said those things because normally he was so very nice to them all. She had finally decided that she would go and see her dad, because he would be able to explain things. She knew that he was with Uncle Severus, trying to find his memories and that he was always tired afterwards. But Flora also knew that no matter how tired or sad he was, her father always made time for his children and never turned them away if they needed him.

Then she remembered "*Pretty Woman*" that was one of Flora and Iona's favourite films; they had seen it several times. Draco had been a prostitute just like in the film, and he thought her daddy would be angry, but Flora thought that her father would be all right about it. Just like Richard Gere had been. Draco was so much better looking than Julia Roberts in her opinion, he obviously loved her father and her father needed someone to love him. Just him.

So when she over heard Uncle Severus telling Dad that he should go and lie down in the infirmary because he was going to have a, "monster headache after that last session." she formulated a plan. If she got Draco and her father together then, maybe, just like in all those movies, love would find a way? They couldn't all be wrong surely? So she spun on her heel and ran as fast as she could for Draco's hut, waiting until she was almost outside before shouting as loudly as she was able to, "Legolas, Legolas come quickly my daddy's been hurt!"

Draco was horrified. Harry hurt? He did not wait to hear what had happened, did not stop to think. Didn't even think to apologise for his hurtful words earlier or wonder whether Flora had forgiven him. Instead, panicked, he ran after the little girl as fast as he could, stumbling a bit and breathing raggedly. She waited for him though and took his hand and together they rushed across the grass towards the castle and the hospital wing.

Harry looked small, diminished somehow, lying in that hospital bed. His eyes were closed and his chest was rising and falling softly, rhythmically. Draco's heart clenched with compassion for this beautiful man, and he knew that he just had to be near him.

He did not notice that he and Harry were alone; did not see that Flora seemed to vanish away. He only saw one person in that stark, white room; he only had eyes for Harry

"Oh my love," he whispered, "what have you done to yourself this time?" And slowly, carefully he walked over to the side of the bed. Hardly daring to touch even the covers instead he just stood there gazing sadly at the man he had loved with all his heart since he was seventeen years old. At his dark raven locks and the long black lashes that curled on his cheeks and Draco could not help himself, so he leaned forward and gently placed a kiss on curved, crimson lips. At the touch of the kiss Harry took a deep breath and opened bright green eyes that all at once filled with love. He stared openly at Draco for a moment or two, silent but smiling tenderly.

"There you are Libellule!" Harry said looking up at him tenderly and reaching out a hand to caress his cheek. "I have been looking for you for the longest time."

Draco's eyes widened and he gasped out loud. He stepped back, one step, two, three. "No! Oh

no." He muttered under his breath. "You are awake! I didn't know you were awake."

Harry still held his gaze but now he looked puzzled. He had pushed himself up into a seated position and he was staring at Draco, his expression was one of concern..

"Draco," he said, "What's wrong?"

Draco ran.

He ran like his sanity, his very life depended on it. As fast as he could on his ruined leg. Down the corridors pell-mell again, and this time away from Harry, away from the flame. Because that was what Harry had become. A bright and all encompassing sun around whom they all circulated and if Draco got any closer he knew that this little dragonfly was going to singe his wings.

Harry didn't want Draco, he couldn't want him. Draco was damaged goods. He was dirty, scarred, unclean. When Harry saw that, saw the real him he would be disgusted and he would turn away and Draco couldn't take that risk, he couldn't allow himself to trust again and so he ran.

Stumbling down the stairs, along passageways, past portraits, which called out to him, rudely. Away from Harry, away from the man he loved. Blindly, not seeing where he was going, sobbing to himself, roughly swiping at his eyes to clear the tears. He reached the entrance hall and bumped all at once, unexpectedly, into the strong firm chest of a stranger. Solid, unmoving, dressed in dark blue aurors robes.

"I've been looking for you," The man said coldly, grabbing his arm with a fist that felt like iron.
"Draco Malfoy you are under arrest for insurrection and conspiracy."

Part Seven

PART SEVEN – MENDING WHAT WAS BROKEN

Court Number One of the Wizengamot was fuller than Severus had ever seen it; even more packed with people than it had been for his last trial all those years ago.

He had been arrested for conspiracy and insurrection, he and Draco both.

He felt hugely guilty for Draco's arrest; it was completely his fault after all. Severus had been charged with working on banned potions for the Lenoir Foundation and he had had to work hard to persuade Draco to help him with those. He had thought that it would help Draco to get back to working on potions and had planned to get him to apprentice to himself.

All that they had been doing for the Foundation was testing how various ingredients interacted with each other; they had not been involved in any conspiracy or plots. But Severus knew that no-one with any power was about to believe that, this was about the fact that he had been a Death Eater and that Draco was the only living Malfoy and neither Scrimgeour nor Umbridge was ever going to let them go now that they finally had them.

But at least Severus had committed some crimes. He had never been an optimistic man, therefore he had spent the last few years waiting for the “other shoe to drop” and to find himself where he was today.

But why Draco?

He had already suffered so much in his life and Severus knew this trial was finally going to break him.

He was also worried about Iona; she had been with him when the aurors came. She had been roughly pushed to the side and had crashed into a wall, the men had refused to check on her and Severus had been unable to see anyone to find out how she was.

He shifted in the uncomfortable seat in which they had chained him and tried to catch Hermione's eye. But she was sobbing in Ron's arms; the sight of Bill, her kind loving brother-in-law sitting with his head bowed, hiding the scars that he had received during his defense of Hogwarts, chained and caged at the front of the courtroom along with the other “dark creatures” had finished Hermione and she was not coping at all well. All the Weasleys were there looking understandably distressed. All of them that was, with the exception of Molly and Fleur. Molly was looking after the children and Fleur, who was pregnant with their third child, was under sedation at the Weasley house.

Bill was totally blameless, and had surely not expected to be arrested. But whereas he and Draco faced extended terms in Azkaban, Bill and the other five people sharing the cage, well they faced death.

Scrimgeour was obviously also out to get the Lenoir Foundation. Severus had been shocked when he had found out just how many things the Foundation had been involved in over the years. From orphanages to hospitals to businesses and magical primary schools, all of the interests seemed benign though. In truth the main thing that seemed to be upsetting the Minister and his cronies was the involvement of the foundation in potions research; that and the fact that the seemed to be guilty

of owning more than half the wizarding world.

But Lenoir was French and not here and so Scrimgeour seemed intent on prosecuting them instead.

Severus was hugely frustrated; he had only managed to speak to Kingsley Shacklebolt, Head of the Auror Service briefly when he had been brought in today.

It seemed that one of the reasons that Hermione was so distraught was that Harry was missing too. Apparently Fi had told Hermione that there was something that Harry had to do and he'd said he would be here. But the trial had been droning on for about two hours now and there was still no sign of Potter.

Not only that, but one of the charges against himself was that he had hated Harry when the boy had been in school and that he and Draco had participated in his torture. What worried Severus was that even if Harry was called to testify there was no way that he could honestly say that they hadn't. As Severus had seen, most of Harry's memories were damaged beyond repair and he could not truthfully say that something like that had not happened.

He was also desperately worried about Draco. The blonde man had totally given up it seemed. He sat slumped in the chair that they had given him, the very picture of despair. He had not lifted his head since he had been brought in and had even had to be roughly dragged to his feet when the "charges" against him were read out. Right now he was rocking gently backwards and forwards and humming very quietly to himself.

Severus was appalled by the aurors treatment of them, they had been rough and uncaring, with him, Severus. But the way that they had treated this poor broken creature was inexcusable, why they felt the need to drape him in chains and take away his somewhat shabby robes to replace them with prison clothing Severus could not possibly imagine.

Dolores Umbridge was standing at the front of the courtroom, ranting about the danger to innocent children from dark creatures. She had been droning on for ages and Severus had decided that she really didn't want to hear any more of her sanctimonious claptrap, when all at once the large doors to the court burst open and two people strode into the body of the court.

The man who had come in was tall and handsome. He was immaculately dressed in black, beautifully cut robes. He stood tall and proud, with his head held high which was why it took Severus a moment or two to recognise Remus Lupin before he began to address the court.

"Madam Adjudicator," he said, to Emily Whittering-Smythe who was the current head of the Wizengamot, "if you would be so kind as to allow me to address the court," and when she nodded her assent. "I am Remus Lupin and I am here as a director to represent the Lenoir Foundation."

The court erupted in noise and confusion.

Then Rufus Scrimgeour, jumped to his feet,

"Arrest that man!" He shouted, "he is a registered dark creature and I want him in chains." Two aurors moved towards him ready to take his arms

"Stop!" Someone else was walking into the court and as he came the very air around him crackled with the power of his magic. It seemed to be radiating from him in powerful waves. The man's hair and robes moved gently in the magical airs that surrounded him and his green eyes danced with life and mischief.

Severus was startled from his observation of all this sudden action, from a whispered voice beside

him

“Harry?” Said Draco in a tiny voice, looking up from his contemplation of the floor, eyes alive once more and face shining with hope, “Harry?”

“Don’t you dare, lay a finger on that man!” Harry said in a voice that was as strong and as powerful as his entire demeanour. “If you touch him you will trigger an international incident and be in direct contravention of all Anglo/French magical diplomatic agreements. Remus Lupin is a French Citizen and he is also my friend and colleague.”

This time it took a good twenty minutes before order was restored

“Potter?” Spat Scrimgeour viciously, when things had calmed down somewhat. “How dare you come in here like this, disrupting a court of law and interrupting proceedings? I have a good mind to have you arrested for contempt of court.”

“No Minister you will not, I have every right to be here today as I am answering the summons that I was sent, my lawyer has a copy.” At that statement he reached behind him to take a scroll of parchment from one immaculately suited pink-haired Tonks

“But....bbbut, you are Harry Potter.”

“I am that, Scrimgeour,” said Harry and then eliciting an eruption of laughter from the enthralled audience. “It’s good to know that our elected officials are so observant. I am and have always been Harry Potter but, Je suis connu aussi comme Henri Lenoir”

(I am also known as Harry Black)

He idly waved one hand in the general direction of the prisoners and all at once the chains and the cage dissolved. The heavy iron shackles vanished and Draco seemed startled to see that his had not disappeared but had transformed into delicate jewel laden cuffs with one single long chain connecting them. However he barely had time to examine them before Harry was speaking again.

“Can I ask you why our war heroes are being treated so shamefully Minister? Without these men and, none of us would still be alive,” he said gesturing the same hand towards Severus, Draco and Bill causing several aurors to leap back out of the way, just in case Harry was about to perform more magic.

“Could I also ask is this some vendetta against me? After all I have just come from my sister-in-law’s bed-side. She was injured when your men arrested Professor Snape. She will be okay but she is very shaken up.” Harry looked directly at Severus as he said this, as if trying to offer him comfort. “Bill Weasley, is no dark creature, but he is the brother of my best friend. Professor Snape is in fact my only living uncle and Draco Malfoy is the man I love. Call me paranoid if you like but that seems awfully suspicious to me.”

With that he strode across the room towards them he winked at Severus

“Are you all right Uncle Sev, I am sure this is just a misunderstanding, we’ll have you both out of here in no time!”

Then he turned to Draco and took him tenderly in his arms. Staring into Draco’s shocked grey eyes he said, gently pulling on the chain that Draco wore as he spoke, “that’s not coming off until we have talked, you are not running away on me again my love.” He smiled at the fragile man that he was holding and then he leaned down and claimed Draco’s mouth in a deep and passionate

kiss.”

The majority of the crowd were now on their feet, cheering and clapping loudly

And Severus Snape for only the second, and one would hope the last time in his wizarding career fainted clean away.

Emily Whittering-Smythe, was pounding her gavel on the dais in front of her when Severus returned to consciousness. The court was in complete and utter chaos.

“Order, order, order” She was shouting, “Mr Potter, could you please put Mr Malfoy down so that proceedings can continue? Mr Potter, MR POTTER!!!”

“I’m sorry Your Honour but Harry cannot hear you, he was tortured into deafness by Voldemort, you’ll just have to ask someone to tap him on the shoulder or something,” Hermione said, looking up from hugging Ginny Zabini. Her eyes were sparkling with delight at the sheer surprise and joy of it all. Those eyes still seemed a bit red and sore from the crying she had been doing. But her face was shining with hope now too, for she obviously was of the belief that Harry was about to make things alright again, far more alright than they had been in a very long time.

Severus noticed that she, Ginny and Harry were not the only ones out of their seats half the court seemed to be shouting, trying to make sense of what was happening. Remus and Tonks were in the centre of a gaggle of people; all asking questions at once and the Weasleys were across the room from where they had been sitting hugging and patting Bill in one big scrum of redheaded maleness.

None of them knew how Harry planned to save their brother from imminent death but they were all obviously of the opinion that he would do just that.

The Right Honourable Emily Whittering-Smythe looked enquiringly over at the gathered aurors who were watching proceedings from the sidelines

“Would someone like to oblige?” she asked gesturing at Harry and Draco who were still locked in a loving embrace and didn’t seem to be planning to break apart any time soon. But nobody moved, it seemed that the cream of Scrimgeour’s aurors did not fancy trying to separate the Harry Potter who had just demonstrated such enormous magical power with such careless dismissal from the lover that they had only hours ago treated with harshness and contempt.

Until finally,

“Oh for Merlin’s sake!” Severus leaned over and gently squeezed Harry’s arm

“HHnnn?” Said Harry, looking in bewilderment at his uncle and then at a gesture from Severus he looked directly at the judge. “Oh sorry Your Honour, it’s just that I have not seen Draco in such a long time.” He cupped Draco’s cheek gently in one hand, he used the index finger of the other to wipe away a single tear from Draco’s cheek. “I will never let anyone hurt you again Libellule.,” he said, before he tenderly lowered a stunned Draco, still wearing his pretty chains, back to the chair that he had been sitting on. But not without quickly changing it a very sleek black leather bucket chair first.

His eye’s met Severus’ and he waggled his eyebrows, just once before letting his face break into an enormous smile and Severus, careful to ensure that no one else could see mouthed at him

“You are enjoying this aren’t you Potter? And if you ever call me Uncle Sev again I will strip out

your guts and use them as a tie!"

"Of course I am enjoying it *Professor*" whispered Harry with a chuckle. "I have waited a long time to kick Scrimgeour and Umbridge's arses and I have a number of scores to settle today! Why don't you sit back and enjoy the proceedings?" And then with his grin growing if possible even wider. "Of course you know better than anyone how much I enjoy my fame," then without more ado, he transformed the hard wooden chair that Severus had been chained to for the last two hours into just the sort of comfortable high-backed wing chair that Severus loved.

, "Ooops sorry Uncle Sev nearly forgot about you and it would not do to have my favourite uncle uncomfortable would it? That would make me very cross!" He said loudly as he turned away from the two men in order to move to the witness stand.

He eyed the aurors as he said this. "Would someone care to get my uncle a glass of water? He has obviously had a very trying few days." As he spoke, a couple of them clutched at each other in fright, whimpering slightly. One turned and left the room with alacrity and another took a leaf out of Severus's book and fainted clean away. Severus growled menacingly at his nephew, but Harry of course did not hear a thing and anyway Severus thought ruefully, he wouldn't have cared even if he had heard him.

Even after Harry had returned to the centre of the court and transfigured himself a chair identical to Draco's it still took some considerable time to get the court settled enough for the proceedings to continue. People had moved round to sit closer to friends so they could comment on the proceedings to each other. The Weasleys took ages to settle themselves and Tonks and Remus took out their wands and created a large mahogany desk on which they proceeded to pile papers.

Harry took a glass of water from a trembling auror, who had also just given drinks to Draco and Severus,

"Thanks!" He said, "Don't forget Mr Weasley and his companions will you?"

Bill smiled over at Harry in gratitude. He and the other people who had been imprisoned in the cage like the wild animals Scrimgeour insisted them to be, were also now seated on comfortable, transfigured furniture. The floor of the Wizengamot currently resembled a rather smart coffee bar and the aurors delivering refreshments to the accused only added to the atmosphere.

Once everything had grown quiet Harry looked up at Emily Whittering-Smythe and smiled charmingly. "I am ready Your Honour, I am so sorry to have kept you waiting for so lon. Do you think someone could tell me why myself, my family and friends and my charitable foundation seem to be on trial?"

"I certainly think somebody should start explaining Mr Potter," said the judge, "I must admit I am rather intrigued as to why these proceedings have been called today myself."

"Thank you Your Honour, but please call me Harry."

Scrimgeour rose to his feet then. He was visibly seething with anger and frustration, it was very obvious that the trial was not proceeding in the way that he had expected it to.

"The Lenoir Foundation is charged with conspiracy against the elected magical government of this country. He began. "These men." He sneered, pointing at Draco and Severus as he spoke. "Are charged with taking part in the conspiracy and with being Death Eaters and those creatures," this last said with yet another sneer and a curled lip in the direction of Bill "are dark and dangerous and need to be destroyed."

The crowd of course had already heard all of this, stated dryly earlier. But after the considerable lightening of the atmosphere that Harry's arrival and produced, they ooohed and aaahed and booed Scrimgeour's words causing him to turn to them and produce a scowl of such magnitude that it would surely have been able to turn milk!

"I see," said Harry, "and exactly which part of funding hospitals, schools and orphanages would form the main part of the conspiracy? Or perhaps the fact that the foundation also helps small businesses in their time of need, that might be the conspiracy? Or maybe," and here Harry stopped and smiled over at a furiously scribbling press phalanx "the conspiracy is the fact that only this morning the Lenoir Foundation bought the Daily Prophet newspaper and floated the shares about." At this point he looked at his watch. "Ten minutes ago on the Gringotts Stock Exchange, which means the wizarding world now has a free press and the sort of articles which suggested that I was so ill that the only hope for me was an extended stay in St Mungo's might not be printed in future." The crowd was on its feet again and the press corp. were also up, they had risen as a single unit when Harry had disclosed this last bit of information and were dancing round cheering and hugging each other

Harry was shouting now. "I had doubted for some time that we had a free press when The Prophet started printing articles that suggested that," it was Harry's turn to sneer and he managed magnificently. "*Dolores Umbridge* was my favourite teacher at school when everyone knew that not only did she give me endless detention but she used a blood quill to make me write time after time that I was telling lies when I tried to assert that Voldemort had returned!"

The crowd were shouting now "Shame!" and "How could she, and to Harry Potter too?"

The Right Honourable Emily Whittering-Smythe had to use a sonorous charm this time to try to bring the crowd back in order.

"**THAT IS ENOUGH!!**" She bellowed "**I WILL HAVE SILENCE OR I WILL CLEAR THIS COURT!!**" That had an immediate affect on every one; nobody wanted to miss what was happening in Court Number One, as it was the most interesting thing that many of them had seen for years.

Even the press settled happily eyeing Scrimgeour and Umbridge, hungrily, obviously planning what they were going to write first now that the Ministry no longer had any control over them.

"Or is it the fact," said Harry his voice so low that everyone had to lean in to listen, "that the Lenoir foundation has found the cure for Lycanthropy and apart from these five people there are no werewolves left in Europe as far as we know, and that we have also developed a lotion which will cure the sort of scars that Bill Weasley has had to deal with even if they were more than twenty years old?"

This time the court was so out of control with rejoicing that Emily Whittering-Smythe lowered her head to her hands and just let them get on with it for a while.

The chaos went on, but Draco did not hear it. The noise seemed to him to come from far away, from a whole other world. He did not really see it either. He sort of noticed that the Weasley twins were alternating dancing the waltz with each other and snogging complete strangers, both male and female. That big, tough Charlie Weasley was hugging his brother as if he'd never let him go again and crying like a five-year-old. That Ron and Hermione were comforting a delighted but shocked Arthur Weasley and that a whole host of past school acquaintances were leaping around and laughing and congratulating each other as if it had been they who had seriously embarrassed the minister of Magic and his odious apprentice.

Scrimgeour and Umbridge whose imminent downfall had triggered such celebrations were bellowing at each other and at some poor clerk who was trying to sort out paperwork. Emily Whittering-Smythe on the other hand seemed to be having a nice cup of tea.

But Draco was disconnected from this mayhem. He only had eyes for Harry and anything else was merely mist before the wind. Harry sat serene in the centre of all the noise and confusion, smiling up at Remus Lupin his green eyes dancing and his dear mouth curved into a smile. He was Draco's focus. His past, present and future, as finally after many years of loneliness and loss, Draco had come home.

He looked down at the cuffs he was wearing and smiled shyly to himself, as he reached out a tentative finger and caressed them. Harry had made them for him, and Merlin they were exquisite, the silver cuffs were delicately engraved with complex Celtic knotwork and the creatures that were woven within the intricate carving were unsurprisingly, dragonflies. Shining and iridescent, made of chips of diamond and emerald and cobalt enamel all painted with gold.

How did Harry do that? Seemingly without a thought he had created a thing that was truly lovely and given it to Draco. But that was Harry wasn't it? He always made beauty from ugliness and turned nightmares into wonderful dreams of hope.

Draco knew that Harry had come just in time to save him once again, one moment later and it would have been too late. Draco had been standing on the edge of a bottomless canyon looking into the abyss, but Harry had held him and Harry had kissed him and Draco had seen in his eyes and felt on his lips that Harry loved him. Truly loved him and that as long as he had Harry he would never be alone again.

He put his hand to his mouth to trace where the kiss had been and smiled again and then he looked up and his grey eyes shining with the unshed tears of true happiness met those of Harry and Harry smiled back at him with such love that Draco was almost undone.

Severus finished the cup of tea that a quaking auror had brought him. He had watched Draco begin to relax. He saw the young man had his entire attention fixed on Harry. Draco would have no idea about what was going on, and what was more, he didn't seem to care. The court had quieted because the crowd had realised that whilst it was quite nice to discuss things that had happened it was even better to find out what was going to happen next, so they rearranged themselves in their various seats and proceedings started again.

“Thank you Harry, for your testimony.” Began The Right Honourable Emily Whittering-Smythe. She was smiling at Harry her eyes twinkling over her half moon spectacles in a way that was strongly reminiscent of Albus Dumbledore “I think that you have conclusively proved to this court’s satisfaction that the Lenoir Foundation did not take part in any conspiracy and that these people, as they can be cured so easily can no longer be classed as dark creatures.”

“But Emily,” said Scrimgeour, leaping to his feet in indignation. “Potter has not proved anything of the sort, and those dark creatures cannot be allowed to leave the court they are a danger to society! Our children are not safe. How can we be sure that Potter is not lying? Or bewitched by those....those Death Eaters.” With that he jabbed a pointing finger viciously in the direction of Severus and Draco

“Rufus,” said Whittering-Smythe, sharply “This is still my court, not yours! I think he has more than proved that neither he nor his foundation has been guilty of any wrong doing, and here after all, it is still my opinion that counts! And the name is *The Right Honourable Emily Whittering-*

Smythe to you!"

"This has got to stop!" Shouted Scrimgeour, with the edge of hysteria tingeing his voice " This... this...boy!!" this last word spat out so fiercely that several members of the front row leapt back in their seats in alarm. "Is making a mockery of British magical justice, He comes swanking in here as if he owns the court, as if he can do whatever he pleases, who the fuck does he think he is, he is nothing anymore! Do you hear me? Nothing!"

"He is a hero," this last comment was said in a quiet voice that was nonetheless compelling and caused several of the crowd to look around to see who was speaking.

Severus' jaw dropped. For moving towards Scrimgeour, trembling violently but obviously very determined was a wraith-like Draco Malfoy. Draco surely didn't realise what a frail picture he presented. His hair shone like spun silver in the flickering torchlight of the Wizengamot and he was drowned in the robes, which appeared to be several sizes too big for him. He was thin right now as well, too thin and his cheeks seemed drawn in with worry and pain, his grey eyes were huge in his pale white face and he resembled nothing so much as a rabbit standing up to a ravenous wolf.

The court was for the first time that day completely silent. No one said a word; many seemed scared to draw breath.

Draco felt weak at the knees when he realised that so many people were looking at him, he hid away these days whenever he could, from crowds, from new people. The Draco Malfoy of his childhood would have revelled in the attention that his words had provoked but this Draco swayed slightly on his feet and nearly died inside, from embarrassment. But he was determined to defend Harry from this brutal man who obviously hated him, Draco was furious in his own quiet way, how dared he treat Harry like this?

"Harry Potter is worth ten of you," Draco continued, his voice, unlike any other part of him right now was strong and unwavering though pitched low so many had to strain to hear. "He is a hero, our hero, *my hero*, he saved the wizarding world, and killed the most evil wizard who ever lived but he saved me too."

He had moved forwards toward Scrimgeour limping a little with his damaged leg, and it was Scrimgeour who moved back away from this fragile nemesis as the burning intensity of Draco's gaze bore into his very soul.

"If it had not been for Harry I would have gone mad in there." He said, his head tilted to one side and his eyes staring back to a time when the only world that he had known had been destroyed piece by piece and when he had been destroyed too. "For a long time in fact I *was* truly insane."

"They first raped me the night they killed my mother, they tortured her to death you know. They took it in turns to fuck me as I listened to her screams. I do not remember how many it was, I lost count after about twenty. They took me in my mouth and in my arse and it was violent and bloody and I was lost and broken. But Harry put me back together again. I was the *pet* of Death Eaters, not their equal. They kept me naked and in a collar and fucked me when they felt like it."

Scrimgeour had backed as far away from Draco as he could. He was whimpering now but Draco kept on relentlessly nevertheless telling his story of unimaginable pain and anguish.

"And Severus too, he helped us in there. He was a spy for the Order of the Phoenix, and sometimes when he did not know that I was there I watched him crying for what he had to see and do."

Severus's hung his head as Draco continued, several members of the audience were sobbing softly. But Draco was unaware of them as he carried on his terrible tale, giving Scrimgeour no retreat and no sanctuary from his words.

"It tore him apart, because we were just children, me and Harry and he was the adult and he wanted to rescue us. But he couldn't you see until all the dark things that Voldemort had made to make him immortal were destroyed.

"And he helped," Draco turned and gestured at Bill Weasley. "He broke the curses at great risk to his safety, when he was often in pain from his wounds. I know because his brother told me.

"But what did you do Mr Scrimgeour to defeat Voldemort? Because I don't remember you until afterwards, when you tried to have Severus and I found guilty of being Death Eaters, even though you knew that Harry had left magical testimony to prove that this what not the case."

There were a number of gasps as he said this as neither Scrimgeour nor Umbridge had ever made the fact of Harry's testimony public. His words would have gone a long way to redeeming Severus in the eyes of the magical community and may well have prevented Draco turning away from the wizarding world where he had been so hated and reviled. No one had ever really heard Draco's side of the story, not even Severus or Ron and no one outside a select few had ever heard what had happened to Harry.

"You had the parchments that told of our innocence, written in Harry's blood. It's the physics of magic liquid to liquid, solid to solid and Harry had nothing to transform down there. I know because I shared his prison. But you weren't there Mr Scrimgeour, you did nothing to help us." Draco was right up against him now, he was smaller than the ex auror by some considerable amount but none of the spectators who sat spell bound in that courtroom were in any doubt of who was the stronger man that day

Scrimgeour was begging now, "Nononono, please let me be." He fell to his knees almost but not quite knocking Draco over. Goliath, slain by David. With just a few words, sharp and true.

"All you have done as far as I can see is lie and manipulate and steal the praise that should belong to others. Mr Scrimgeour I accuse you of conspiracy, malevolence and extreme prejudice. What did you ever do to help save the world?"

"NO! STOP IT GET OFF HIM YOU EVIL GOBLIN!!!"

Dolores Umbridge rushed forward to help Scrimgeour, finally having enough of what was happening, she was surprisingly fast for her bulk and shape.

She roughly shoved Draco aside sending him flying across the room and then she turned her wand upon him ready to deliver a hex.

"Don't you dare!" Harry shouted.

"Draco!"

Even after all these years he still had the skills of a seeker and he caught his precious burden before he hit the ground removing Umbridge's wand as he did so with a wordless spell.

Now Whittering-Smythe was on her feet. "That will do!" she shouted, "How dare you disrupt my court in this fashion,"

Umbridge turned her mocking expression in Harry's direction

“Finally.” She sneered, “you are going to get what is coming to you!”

“Don’t be ridiculous you stupid woman! I wasn’t talking to Harry!” Emily Whittering-Smythe, snarled contemptuously.

“Aurors arrest this person, she is threatening innocent people and disrupting my court.”

Severus was stunned; he had watched the proceedings with astonishment. Harry’s revelations left him reeling! Harry was Lenoir!! He had wondered whether the Foundation were working on an improved form of Wolfsbane, because the ingredients that he had been testing were so familiar to him. But he had never dreamt that they would pull off a coup d'état like this, he wondered who their potions expert was, because whoever had created this brew was surely a genius.

He would never have imagined either that Harry was the one who had ordered such a thing, who was responsible for the philanthropy for which Lenoir had become famous. For building up support over the years from ordinary wizards and for, in effect, staging a bloodless revolution and taking over the wizarding world. Something like that was ambitious, it was cunning it was politically skilful, it was something, well, very *Slytherin* to have done

Furthermore he was stunned by Harry’s display today, he was so incredibly powerful. Severus had never seen anything like the power that Harry seemed to have at his command. Harry had kept a low profile on the whole magic thing in the almost seven days that he had been at Hogwarts.

In fact he had kept a low profile on everything hadn’t he? None of them, not himself, nor Ron, nor Hermione had had any idea about the Lenoir Foundation, or the Lycanthropy Potion, or *The Prophet* buy out, or even Lupin and Tonks. Severus had wondered a couple of times about them and almost asked Harry, but the Marauders had always been a such a touchy subject between them and their new found friendship was so fragile....that....well, he hadn’t liked to ask.

Severus had been in Harry’s mind a lot over the last few days and he had seen nothing of this, he was sure that Harry’s earlier happy memories had been destroyed. Those strange distorted phantasmal images in his mind could not be faked, because Severus could feel that they were real.

But the Foundation memories, Harry must have occluded those, and when had Harry remembered Draco? Because Severus had seen no memories in Harry’s mind that would explain his behaviour towards Draco now. His gut feeling was that those memories must have been what was hidden behind the strange barrier in Harry’s psyche but Severus did not know how such a barrier could have come about, or how it could have ended. He had never believed such a thing to be possible, but then Harry seemed to specialise in impossible things didn’t he?

Severus had suspected that his godson had truly gone mad again when he had told him about Harry. He had even gone so far as to discuss the situation with Iona, wondering if Draco had been losing all grasp of reality. He did not doubt that the boys had grown close in that prison. After all they must have come to rely on each other totally, but love? Surely not, after such enmity that had existed between them? But Draco had been right, what Severus was witnessing between them now, what half the worthies of the wizarding world were witnessing was indeed nothing less than the deepest, most compelling love.

Harry was currently comforting Draco tenderly, lovingly with all of his attention, as if nothing else mattered, and Severus could see that for that moment in time, for Harry, nothing else did. His godson had been fine when he had been defending his Harry but then once that cow Umbridge had sent him flying he had noticed all the faces watching him and he had once again crumbled.

Severus wondered how close Draco was to being totally lost to insanity. He had been behaving quite erratically since Harry's return and these last two days had put so much strain on an almost broken mind.

Severus wished he could get closer but there was so much activity going on because of the incident that had just occurred with Umbridge. Aurors were everywhere and Severus did not plan on getting too close to them again any time soon. But even from where he was across the room he could see Draco had buried his head on Harry's shoulder and that he was trembling uncontrollably. Severus should not have doubted his nephew though for momentarily the thin baggy prison robes were gone and in their place Draco now wore a thick dark-green robe with a deep hood which Harry gently tugged up to cover Draco's head and give the shy, intensely private man some sanctuary against the stares.

Just then Severus' musings were interrupted because Emily Whittering-Smythe once again called the court to order again and began to speak.

"Well Mr Potter," she said, "I am not sure quite how we proceed from here are you?"

Harry smiled at her. "Perhaps we could summon the parchments I wrote in defence of Draco and my Uncle Severus?" He suggested, "I do not know where they have been all this time, they should have been printed in the Prophet after Voldemort was defeated, that is what I wanted Scrimgeour to do, that is what I asked him to do. But they cannot be destroyed and wherever they are they will come to me if I call them."

"Please then, Harry, go ahead."

Seconds later two crumpled pieces of parchment sat in front of Whittering-Smythe and the court was once again completely silent as the judge bent her head to read. As she read she became increasingly pale and when she finished she had tears in her eyes.

Harry watched her steadily for a moment or two and then he pulled Draco towards him and they both sat down on the black leather sofa that the bucket chair had become.

"Aurors," she said in a voice that cracked from holding back tears. "Please arrest Rufus Scrimgeour."

The Minister for Magic had been sitting up against the wooden barrier to the seating with his head buried in his knees, he did not seem even slightly surprised when the judge ordered his arrest. He simply stood and allowed himself to be led over to join his deputy at the other side of the court.

"Ms Tonks," Whittering-Smythe continued. "I wonder if you could come and read these aloud to the court for me, as Mr Potter's Barrister, I think it ought to be you."

So the now purple haired metamorphmagus moved from Remus' side at their mahogany desk and went to stand before the judge's dais. She took the first piece of parchment and began in a clear calm voice to read the document to the court. She read about the events of the night of Dumbledore's death. About the fake artefact that Harry and Albus had pursued and of the poison that would have killed the Headmaster in the most agonising way, had not Severus killed him as he had been begged to do. She read of Snape's loyalty to the side of Light and the fact that Severus had saved Harry time after time despite the enmity that had between them at the time and finally, she read Harry's impassioned plea that Severus Snape be exonerated for what he had had to do.

When she finished there was not a sound in the courtroom it was almost as if the spectators were collectively holding their breath. Then Tonks replaced the first piece of parchment, took up the

second and began to read again.

Dear Minister Scrimgeour

I am sending you this letter because
I am not very sure that I will come out
of here alive. I am growing weaker and
weaker every day. There is one thing and
one thing only that has kept me living so
far and that is Draco Malfoy. When I have
been sick he has held me. When I cried he
kissed away my tears. When I was frightened
he told me stories and when I despaired
he held my hand.

I know Sir, that in the next few days I will
face Voldemort, I dream of it every night
and I promise you that I will not fail to kill
him. But I am frightened that I shall not leave
the battle alive.

I am not scared to die Sir, because this has
Been my purpose since I was eleven years old
But if I know Draco is safe I can die in peace.

Please Sir; I commend him to your care
look after him for me and protect him and tell the
wizarding world that without him I would have
died long since.

He and Professor Snape have been true
heroes of this war without their support and care
there would be no Chosen One right now and
Voldemort would already rule us all. I have enclosed
evidence of Professor Snape's innocence which
will absolve him

Please send these documents to the Daily Prophet so
That every one in the magical community
will know the truth. That it was my last wish,
my only wish. That Severus Snape and my lover Draco Malfoy
be cared for and looked after,
I shall ask for nothing else.

Yours sincerely

Harry James Potter

Tonks was crying openly when she finished reading the letter. Indeed more than half the court, including The Right Honourable Emily Whittering-Smythe were sobbing.

In the centre of the room sat Harry and Draco. Harry cuddling the blonde man, as if he were the most precious thing in the world. He was stroking his hair gently and whispering softly and Draco was curled like a cat in Harry's arms.

For both of them it seemed the court, the proceedings had ceased to exist.

Severus knew that he and Draco were about to be acquitted. He had heard of the parchment that Harry had written about him before when Hermione and Ron had discovered its existence. They had managed to procure it so that she could examine it closely, as seemingly, because Scrimgeour had continued trying to suppress it had unrelentingly kept popping back up like the proverbial bad penny. It had eventually turned up on Arthur Weasley's desk in the middle of a report about enchanted cricket bats.

However it seemed that just freeing Draco and acknowledging the existence of the parchment had been enough to suppress the passionate plea for Draco's freedom that Harry had written from his cell.

Severus was appalled.

He knew why it happened of course! If the magical world had known about Harry's letter they would have embraced Draco, as a hero and Scrimgeour had long been an adversary of Lucius' Malfoy. Had the magical world seen Harry's letter in its entirety Severus very much doubted that the Malfoy fortune would have been confiscated, and the boy would surely never have become the hated symbol of evil that he had become? But Harry had done his best, how was a then sixteen year-old-boy to know that his possibly dying wish would be so ignored? So perverted by others?

He could hear the angry murmurings amongst the crowd; he didn't blame them as he felt like muttering angrily himself! What had been done to him was bad enough, but Draco? What he had to suffer in addition to the appalling things that had happened to him during his captivity should never have happened. Harry had tried his best to ensure that Draco would be looked after, only to have those wishes subverted in such a cruel, evil way.

The next words that Emily Whittering-Smythe uttered would not only free them both but they would exonerate them too and Severus knew that people would no-longer treat him as a pariah, disdain his company or whisper behind his back. Instead the whole community, rather than just a few stubborn supporters such as Minerva and the Weasleys would embrace him. He wasn't quite sure how he felt about that, he just hoped that this had not all come too late for Draco's sanity. Then Severus realised that he had not been listening and turned his attention to the judge.

“....Cannot believe that these two men, these two heroes have been so shabbily treated by our elected government. Rufus Scrimgeour has stood here in my court and slandered them and Mr Potter. He and his deputy have also repeatedly attacked Mr Potter in the press. Dolores Umbridge especially I think has tried to blacken his name! At this the Press themselves were all nodding enthusiastically that yes indeed she had.

Furthermore Rufus Scrimgeour and Dolores Umbridge have continually persecuted, so called “Dark Creatures,” when I cannot believe that they did not know that a cure for Lycanthropy was available, at this she looked towards Remus who just nodded once firmly.

I am appalled that this should happen in our society and I declare this case against the six ladies and gentlemen who are listed as Dark Creatures the Lenoir Foundation, Severus Snape and Draco Malfoy to be dismissed.

I furthermore suggest that these two individuals be prosecuted at the earliest convenience, for corruption, slander and extreme malice.” She finished, her impassioned summing up, this time gesturing towards Scrimgeour and Umbridge.

At this point a very elderly man stood up and cleared his throat. Barnaby Bartholomew was one of the oldest members of the Wizengamot and he inclined his head respectfully towards Whittering-Smythe.

“Your Honour,” he began, “I wonder if I could just make a comment at this point?

“Certainly you may Barnaby, do go ahead.”

“I would just like to say that I believe that we should not wait to prosecute these two people. I find myself completely disgusted by their behaviour. I too believed Severus Snape to have managed to cleverly evade justice somehow. Even I, one of the senior members of the Wizengamot had only heard of the parchment absolving him, I had never seen it in its entirety.” He turned to Severus and this time bowed to him. “I apologise Sir, for doubting you.

“I too believed, after recent press articles that Harry Potter had been so injured by what had happened to him when he was held by Voldemort that he had become damaged beyond our help, and yet I can see that he is in fact a most admirable individual who deserves nothing less than the complete admiration that he has previously always commanded.” He bowed toward Harry in acknowledgement. Harry was paying attention again. Tonks had tapped him on his arm and fired off a quick comment in sign language. Harry didn’t seem to be planning on letting go of Draco though, possibly ever again.

“Finally I am appalled by what has happened to Mr Malfoy.” Barnaby Bartholomew continued. “The story that I have heard today has chilled me to the very bone; I think that Scrimgeour and Umbridge have had more of a hearing than they gave to any of these men. Who are indeed, as you say, heroes. I do not think a subsequent trial would be fair on those who have spoken today and that I at least have heard enough evidence to make my decision.”

“Hear, hear!” Echoed a number of other members of the Wizengamot

“If you think this to be the case, Barnaby, and if no one has any objection to us proceeding in such a manner,” said Whittering-Smythe, “then please do give us your decision.”

“Thank you Emily.” Said Bartholomew and looked around to see if anyone would make a comment against his suggestion, but nobody did, and so he continued again. “On the charges of corruption, slander and extreme malice I believe Rufus Scrimgeour and Dolores Umbridge, to be guilty as charged.

Then against the background of cheering crowds each and every member of the Wizengamot, all seventy-three of them stood up, one by one and echoed the conclusion.

Guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty

When Draco had been thrown backwards he had for the first time seen some of the faces in the crowd, and all at once he had realised. He *knew* these people. They would not help him, they never had.

People in amongst those spectators had called him names, had spat on him, had encouraged him to leave his heritage behind and seek solace with Muggles. Day after day of hatred, when he had been grieving for Harry, grieving for the loss of hope, and then it came to Draco that the last time he had been surrounded by a hostile crowd like this had been the time that he had been raped.

Suddenly he was having a flashback. He was there again, in that huge gracious room. He could smell it, feel it, taste it. Draco panicked. He had to get away. They were going to hurt him again! He could not bear it again. He began to shudder violently.

But all at once he felt strong arms around him, holding him, petting him and he knew instinctively that he was safe. The smell of Harry, the feel of him was enough to ground Draco to stop the rising terror. He was in the courtroom wasn't he? With Harry. No Death Eaters here. But he could not turn around, he could not look at the faces the hatred in their eyes again, and so he hid. He hid his face in Harry's robes and held him as tight as he could as if he would never let him go, and Harry, why Harry, held Draco close in return. All at once Draco felt very cold and started to shiver, then he was wrapped in a Slytherin Green robe which covered him from head to toe. Harry was safe now, no one would hurt him here, the judge had seen to that and Draco could retreat, so he did.

Inside the heavy hood Draco wished the courtroom away and listened to Harry's voice and tuned out everyone else, sometimes if things got noisy again he hummed to himself and then Harry would stroke his hair or make those idle circles on his back like he had first done all that time ago and Draco fell into a kind of stupor whilst all around him history was being made.

He was startled out of his daydreams by a touch that was not Harry's and he started violently.

"It's okay Libellule, It is the Right Honourable Emily Whittering-Smythe she will not hurt you. She wants to speak to you."

"Please Harry," said a kind, friendly voice, "for you and Draco my name is Emily." Whoever she was this woman, she seemed kind enough so Draco decided that she was probably safe and he peeped out at her enquiringly

"Mr Malfoy, do you know, do you realise that you are free? Your case has been dismissed."

"Am I," does that mean I can go with Harry and not go back to prison?

"It certainly does Mr Malfoy."

"Oh!" Said Draco, "good."

"Won't you come out now? There are a lot of people who want to talk to you you know?"

"Oh!" Said Draco in a tiny voice, "I can't, I can't come out," and then he whispered *they hate me you know?*"

Draco did not know that there was a charm on the floor of the court and everything that was said in the vicinity of the judge, unless she cancelled it was heard around the court and several members of the audience gasped at Draco's words

"They do not, Mr Malfoy, I guarantee it, not any more!"

"But some of them do, they spat at me and called me a Death Eater and said that I should be dead. I'm sorry, you must think I'm such a coward but ..." in a tiny whisper "I can't take much more you see, the last couple of days, if Harry weren't here I....I don't know that I would....." Draco could not continue, "You must think I am dreadfully weak?"

"Believe me Draco, if anyone tried to do anything like that to you in my court they would find themselves in Azkaban so quickly that their feet would not touch the ground! And on the contrary, I think you are one of the bravest individuals that I have ever met and it is a pleasure to meet you!" She held out her hand to shake with Draco.

Draco looked at it for a mere second before he sat up straight – though still keeping Harry close and held out his own hand in return. After all he decided, he might be as "mad as a box of

monkeys”, - and Draco was under no illusion that he did often hover on the edge on insanity at the very least, -but he was a Malfoy and he did have impeccable manners.

As he sat up one of the spectators spoke to him

“Mr Malfoy, do you think I could have a word with you?”

Draco was scared, he was terrified if he were honest. Looking up at the numerous people watching him so intently made him want to bury his head in Harry’s robes and never emerge again. But – as he had just reminded himself - he was a Malfoy. Harry was with him too and this nice judge Emily had just said that she would not let him be harmed, so screwing all his courage up Draco stood. His knees quivered a bit when he realised that the speaker was Tom, the barman at the Leaky Cauldron. Tom who had thrown him out when he had gone in search of food and some of the customers had complained about him. Nevertheless he squared his shoulders, stuck his chin up, as he always did when he was nervous and stood tall.

“Yes Sir,” he said, in as steady a voice as he could manage. “Wwwwwhat would you like to ask to ask me?”

“I don’t need to ask you anything Mr Malfoy, I just wanted to say how sorry I am if I treated you with anything less than respect. I didn’t know, you see, none of us knew what you had been through, not that that is an excuse. But I am sorry, about the way I treated you. It would be the greatest honour I could have if you, would come to my establishment some time.”

Draco was not sure what to say so he just said, “thank you,” very quietly

Then Ron Weasley stood up. “Hey Drax!” he shouted, across the courtroom, from where he sat with Hermione and all of his brothers and their families. “It is us that should be thanking you for saving Harry?”

Draco’s eyes went wide

Then Ron started to clap and within several seconds the close to six hundred wizards that were crammed into Court Number One were also standing up and clapping and cheering Draco Malfoy for all they were worth. And the small blonde figure that stood in their midst trembling very slightly was amazed that they didn’t hate him anymore and when Harry put his arms around him and disapparated them away Draco was astonished to find that tears were rolling down his cheeks.

Part Eight

PART EIGHT – MENDING WHAT WAS BROKEN

Severus was sitting in front of the fire, when Remus came over to join him. He handed Severus a whisky made just how he liked it. A nice peaty malt with a touch of ice. A silence fell between them, one which was not terribly comfortable.

Severus found himself unaccountably jealous that Remus had had Harry all to himself for all these years; it was ridiculous he knew that, but he resented Remus for the fact that he had known that Harry was alive and had told no one. He should really mind most for Ron and Hermione, but he found that he minded most for himself. He and Harry had been getting on so well, he was rapidly becoming very fond of his nephew and his little family and he should have that for years now not just a few days.

Harry and Draco had disappeared again. But this time everyone knew they were safe because Hedwig had come winging in through the kitchen window to the midst of a happy throng with a note telling everyone that the two men were '*getting to know each other again*' and that they would be back in a few days. The children had expressed their disappointment over the loss of their beloved elf very vocally indeed but seemed rather less bothered about the fact that their father was missing too. They seemed to believe that he would turn up soon enough, after all he had gone away for a few days often enough before.

The evening had basically become one long party and Grimmauld place had been fuller that night than it had since the bad old days of the Blacks. Bill had been made interim Minister of Magic, a role suggested by the remorseful Barnaby Bartholomew and Molly Weasley had not stopped sobbing and hugging anything that moved ever since.

Tonks had applied the potion that Harry promised would cure Bill's scars and they were nearly all gone now. There was just a trace of scarring on his cheeks. She had told everyone that whilst the "Wolfscure Potion" as it was known had been in existence for some eight months the lotion had only been perfected a week ago and Bill was the first person outside France to try it. Fleur was ecstatic, she had her husband back, he was as handsome as ever and he was Minister for Magic!

The house was full of children, seemingly hundreds of little Weasleys were mingling with Harry's children and chasing each other in and out of rooms and generally causing mayhem. Finally Molly and Fi had called a halt to the evenings proceedings and roped a few of the adults in to help with bedtime. Ron in his 'Ginger Bear' persona was immensely popular but so, to his great surprise was Severus.

The Weasleys avoided him on principal – the principal that he was a bad tempered snarky git, according to George - but the Potter-MacLeod's loved him and he found himself designated storyteller surrounded by a whole hoard of small people. Cuddled up on a large bed, in what he was told was Harry's room he was handed a Roald Dahl book by Rory and informed that it was Caitie and Calum's favourite and Finn's third favourite story. So with a twin snuggled into each arm and Finn tucked on his lap, and several small Weasleys at a slightly safer distance he began to read all about Sophie and the BFG in his smooth moderated tones.

"I is the only nice and jumbly Giant in Giant Country! I is THE BIG FRIENDLY GIANT! I is the BFG." He paused only to help a little Weasley girl – one of Charlie's he thought, in her mission to climb further up his leg in order to better hear the story and carried on reading until

Harry's vast bed was full of sleeping children.

But now all the children were finally fast asleep and the adults excited chatter had quietened. They were slowly gathering around the fireplace in the cozy red sitting room to hear Remus' story and find out exactly why he and Tonks had kept Harry from them for so long.

"The Harry you see today is not the one that I took from the manor," began Remus. "As you know when Harry disappeared we were all desperate to find his whereabouts, we knew he was with Voldemort but we did not know where his headquarters were. I had gone undercover with the werewolves, hoping desperately that I was not too late to help him, but when I did get there I was certain that I was indeed too late and Harry was about to die."

Voldemort was torturing him, you know that Severus," he said turning toward the potions professor as he spoke." You had not appeared yet and Voldemort had just used a spell in parseltongue which had affected Harry's hearing, he was bleeding from both his ears and screaming in what must have been agony and I knew that I couldn't go to him, that I had to wait my chance, but I will never forget those screams..... I have never seen anything so dreadful, so heartbreakingly as what that evil bastard was doing to Harry."

He paused for a moment staring into space and then took a sip of water before continuing in a somewhat husky voice.

"Then you arrived Severus and when you drew your wand I was convinced for a moment that you were going to kill him but you didn't, you communicated using Legilimency didn't you?" And at Severus's curt nod, "I thought so because all at once Harry who had been slumped over only moments before suddenly stood up straight and challenged Voldemort and then the battle began, Harry had already sent you and Draco to safety by then and finally he and Voldemort began battling in earnest but after what seemed like an eternity when they were both sending a stream of curses at each other everything stopped. Even Harry is not sure about what happened then, I couldn't hear him speaking anymore, it was eerie, everything was frozen the Death Eaters, me and Harry and Voldemort. It was as if time had stood still and yet I knew somehow that everything was going on in their minds, that Harry and Voldemort were somehow linked together and that that is where the battle was raging.

Then Harry shouted that Voldemort couldn't have anyone else, I think you all heard that?" Several people nodded that indeed they had, none of them had ever forgotten the words that Harry had shouted, just before the end of the battle, Remus continued. "I think he could still hear at that point, for some reason Voldemort's spell took a while to work. But after Harry spoke all the Death Eaters started to scream and Harry did too. Then there was a blast of white light and a surge of magic and Harry started to collapse.

Harry was falling and so was the building all around us and I knew that if I didn't get him out he was going to die, we all were. So I ran, climbed, scrambled, past men who were screaming and begging me to help them until I got to Harry. He was already half buried in fallen masonry and I had to dig him out with my bare hands, when I got to him, he was barely breathing. He was so light that I could easily lift him, so I did and then I apparated to Fi's croft because it was the safest place I could think of to go."

Remus had closed his eyes for a moment; he obviously found it hard to relive that day. It was clear to anyone looking at him that the years had been good to Remus. The shabby, poverty stricken werewolf that Severus remembered was gone for good, as was that rather unassuming, apologetic air that Remus had used to project to the world. *This man was used to making things happen, he was used to being in control, to getting things done and being obeyed without question, how on earth had that come about* Severus wondered.

Ron said, “What do you mean Remus?” He was getting cross, Severus could tell, keeping a lid on his temper “ What do you mean the safest place? What about my house? What about Hogwarts? We’d have kept him safe, how could you take him away from us?”

This was exactly what Severus wanted to know, if Harry had been there maybe he would not have spent two years in Azkaban, Draco would not have gone missing. Scrimgeour would not have gotten the hold over the wizarding world that he had. Lupin had a lot to answer for in Severus’ opinion.

But it was Tonks that answered. “You didn’t see him Ron, we weren’t even sure that he was going to live and once we’d got him to *Tigh na Creaga*, Fi’s house, it was too dangerous to move him. I was an auror then, and you know what it is like, you hear things? Well I had heard that Scrimgeour had an advisor, someone who told him what to do, someone who hated Harry. You see he was already working with Umbridge and she certainly had it in for the Chosen One!”

“But we’d have protected him, we’d have kept him safe!” Ron shouted, “Madam Pomfrey could have helped, Mum could have?”

“No Ron.” Tonks answered gently, “You could not. Severus was in prison within hours of the final battle. Hogwarts was not safe. Had Dumbledore been alive maybe it would have been different.” She sent an apologetic glance to Minerva, who nodded back at the metamorphmagus. “But no one else could have kept Scrimgeour away. You have seen how it has been in the last few weeks, the last few years. If he had gotten hold of Harry back then who knows what might have happened to him? He wasn’t the powerful man you see today, he was a broken sixteen year old boy, who was very vulnerable and who had lost his magic.”

“There was always the burrow.” Said Ron, stubbornly, a great bear of a man speaking in such quiet tones

“Think about it Hon?” Tonks continued. “There is no way Harry’s presence could have been kept quiet for very long, too many people coming and going. No, I can’t say I completely agreed with Remus at the time, but in hindsight there was no other choice. Harry was so very ill for so long, he couldn’t communicate, couldn’t eat, he’d been starved, anything we fed him came right back up. For a while we were convinced that we were going to lose him. It was Iona that came up with the final solution and we fed him a diluted version of what Muggles give to girls that have that anorexia.”

“But Nymphadora, I mean no offence towards Fi and Iona,” commented Minerva, “how could you be sure that Muggles could help him? He was a wizarding child and so many of his injuries were caused by magical means weren’t they?”

Yes, they were.” Remus this time, “But I had known Fi all of my life, Iona and I grew up together, they knew all about magic and I knew that Harry would be safe, but I did not expect them to cure Harry, I had my secret weapon, and here he smiled at Tonks.”

“Of course,” Hermione breathed, “Andromeda!”

And Severus remembered, Tonks’ mother was a healer, a very good one come to that. She had never advanced very far at St Mungos because of the prejudice that she had suffered either for marrying a Muggle or being a Black, and those who despised her or gossiped about her had effectively stifled her career and so Andromeda had made a living working with Muggles. She was also one of the few people Severus had ever met who was almost as skilled at potions as he and Lily had been, then Severus knew without a doubt who had been responsible for Wolfsure.

“Yup,” resumed Tonks, “my mother. Fi is a trained nurse and she was able to provide the day-to-

day care that Harry needed, Mum provided the expertise and the potions, but it still took a long time for Harry to begin to get well again. We discovered later when he began to speak that his memories had been decimated, he had no happy memories left at all and he had no idea who I was, and only remembered that Remus was a werewolf. For a long time he screamed and tried to get away whenever Remus went near him, but slowly we convinced him that he was safe and that Remus would never hurt him.

“All he could talk about at first was his dragonfly. “*Libellule*” was the first word he spoke, the first sentence was “Ou’ est ma Libellule? J’ai besoin de ma Libellule!”

(*Where is my dragonfly? I need, my dragonfly!*).

“Time and time again he asked and none of us, not even Harry really, had any idea what he was talking about.

“Mhairi, found him a glass dragonfly one day that a local artist made and we hung it in his window, he would lay and look at it for hours on end with the tears streaming down his cheeks, nearly broke your heart it did.”

“Harry remembered,” Remus interjected, “The day that you were arrested he remembered that Draco was his dragonfly. I don’t know the full story behind it, we’ll have to wait for Harry to tell us, if he ever does, but somehow when he finally got together with Draco he remembered everything. He says he has still got memories missing, but he remembers so much more than he did, he remembered me, and Tonks and he remembers you two.” He said looking at Ron and Hermione. “I don’t know how, but Draco was some sort of key.”

“He had been looking for Draco for years,” Tonks continued “we first set up the Lenoir Foundation by accident, Harry had developed this love for all things French and he sometimes spoke in French, he always did when he talked about his dragonfly, but he didn’t know why, he couldn’t remember.

“Iona had contacted a colleague and we all learning BSL, that’s British Sign Language, because it was so much easier than having to write everything down for Harry and we were telling him about the persecutions that were taking place. He had been with us for three months by then, and he was horrified with what was happening to Slytherins, to anyone that disagreed with Scrimgeour. So he came up with the idea of the Black Foundation, to help folk.

“Only with his new love of everything French he called it The Black Foundation, in French. Fondation Lenoir. Within a couple of months, three at the most, he had made me and Remus directors, we got titles, a salary everything. Harry took nothing from the money for himself, he said the Potter’s were plenty rich enough for him, but thought that Sirius would be delighted to have his money used in such a way.

“It was over a year before he could really participate in the organisation, but we got good practice at signing and he got good practice at lip reading when we would tell him about who we had helped each day. Slowly over the years the small businesses that we invested in prospered, until today the Lenoir Foundation must be one of the richest, most influential companies in the wizarding world.

“There was just one thing that bothered him in all those years and that was Draco Malfoy. Harry felt that Remus as one of Sirius’ oldest friends and me as one of the last of the house of Black should benefit from and administer the money that Sirius left him, but he always held a place open for Draco. There still is a job, an office and twelve years of back pay waiting for him. Whatever they decide after their time alone together, Draco Malfoy is a very rich man.”

“Of course at the time I wondered why Harry was so desperate to find Draco. I put it down to his sense of justice, but now I think that even though he did not know why Harry has been searching for Draco for the last twelve years.

“We had been planning his return, for quite some time and would have come back a couple of years ago, but then Mairi died, and Harry was prostrate with grief, and he had a small baby to look after, and the rest of the children.

“But then you and Draco were arrested and luckily everything that Harry had planned was ready to go into action, and the rest as they say is history...”

Silence fell in the sitting room. There was just the sound of crackling of the flames in the hearth, to fill the quiet, while everyone thought about what they had been told. Tonks leaned against Remus and he reached down to caress her cheek. They had told their story now, and all the years of hiding, of intrigue were over for them. Severus stood and left the room, he felt overcome with sadness, for Harry for Draco, for himself. He made his way to Harry’s bedroom where he stood in the doorway for a long time watching Harry’s children sleeping, and Severus felt the stirrings in his heart of something he had not felt for a very long time, and he knew all at once that that feeling was hope.

They were not in England Draco knew that. He suspected that they were in southern Europe, given the warm, yellowed brightness of the sun. They were in front of a house, a beautiful mellow building with blue-grey shutters and window frames and white stucco walls covered in mimosa. They were in a garden, surrounded by a high sandstone wall, with bright potted geraniums all around them, in terracotta pots, scattered on all the windowsills, bright red flowers against the cool blue.

“Where are we Harry?” Draco asked,

“Harry?

"Harry?"

But Harry did not answer and Draco realised that Harry had not heard him, he had been standing behind him when they apparated with his arms wrapped around Draco’s more slender frame. If Harry could not see his mouth or read his hands then he could not *hear* him. Draco felt a wave of sadness for Harry’s lost sense. To not be able to hear the birdsong that surrounded them, to be unable to listen to the sounds of his children’s voices calling to each other, laughter, music, the sound of the sea. All of these things were forbidden to Harry. Forever.

Hermione of course had not given up and had told Draco that she was searching for a magical solution. But Harry had told her that he had already tried everything, that his cochlear had been totally destroyed, his eardrums rent asunder, Harry was permanently, irrevocably deaf.

Draco spun around to face his rescuer and took his face in both his hands as he had seen Flora do to her father.

“Harry,” he said, “where are we?”

“Well we’re not in Kansas anymore.” Harry replied, with an evil grin

Draco raised one eyebrow and Harry continued. “We are in the South of France some thirty kilometres from Libourne. This is my house, it is private here, peaceful. The children and Fi and I come whenever we can. There is a pool and an orchard. and beehives and a tree house for the

children in that gnarled old tree over there.

“Come on I want to show you around.” and he grabbed Draco’s hand to lead him wherever he was planning to go. Draco followed the excited man as best he could, but his injured leg restricted him so he had to limp in the wake of the ball of energy that was Harry. Harry frowned and turned to see what the problem was, suddenly remembering Draco’s leg, he swept him up into his powerful arms and into the beautiful aged house.

Up rough well-worn stone steps Harry carried him. Holding him as if he were costly beyond measure and fragile beyond repair. Into a dark hall that danced with warm shadows chasing each other across aged, oaken boards, Cradling Draco in his arms Harry went from room to room, explaining as he did so: this is the sitting room, where we read in the evenings, this the playroom where the children like to play, this is the study where I have to work sometimes, until finally they went into a room set for dining, and this is where we will eat tonight.”

He placed Draco carefully in one of the pine carver chairs that surrounded the long cloth covered table and turned away. Draco looked around the elegant room in which they were sitting, plainly furnished with dark furniture and vases of flowers. He shrugged off the cloak that Harry had conjured, as it was far too warm to wear such a garment in here.

“Dobby,” Harry called, “where are you?” Suddenly, there in front of him was a house elf wearing a beautifully pressed, hideously coloured, striped cotton jersey.

“Master Harry Potter Sir wanted Dobby?” Squeaked the elf. “Master is back!”
Then he leapt to one side looking stricken. “Oooh he has a Malfoy with him! Malfoy’s are bad to elves, wicked to elves.”

To Draco’s astonishment he saw that the elf was signing as he spoke, it would obviously be too difficult for Harry to read his lips. But they had got around that problem and seemed to have no problems communicating.

“Hush Dobby, it’s alright, this is *my* Malfoy and he will not hurt you.”

The house elf looked dubious, “but I know this Malfoy, Master Harry Sir, he was a bad child, he hurt house elves!” This last said with a gimlet glare aimed at Draco.

And all at once Draco recognised him, this was the house elf his father had lost to Harry. He could remember Lucius ranting about it, several years ago now. Draco had never been particularly nasty to the house elves although he and his friends had practiced one or two stunning spells on them when they were children. He had never meant any harm, he had believed it the right thing to do and his father encouraged the children’s games. Lucius despised elves and thought them nasty servile little creatures. This one belonged to Harry however, and obviously worshipped his master and Draco now knew what it felt like to be treated cruelly when you were defenseless and weak, so he took it upon himself to try and make friends.

“I am sorry, Dobby if my father offended you, if I hurt you. I was a child who should have known better” he said quietly. “But I am truly sorry and I will not hurt you now, I promise. I am not my father.”

The elf continued to eye him warily but he nodded once, as if to say that it would be okay and then turned to see what Harry had required.

Harry asked the elf for some food and then sat beside Draco, talking to him quietly, telling him about his life and his children, about Mhairi and how he had loved her and how she had died and how lonely he was sometimes. And Draco did not tell him that he knew all this already, because

he had followed Harry around since his return, drinking in any crumb of information about his Harry that he could come across and storing it away in his memory for when he was alone.

But as Harry continued and they ate the delicious, thick cassoulet and crusty bread and drank the icy cold beer that the house elf had provided, Draco realised that he really didn't know anything. Because this time he was hearing things from Harry's perspective and learning more about how his beloved felt about his life and his children and everything else, everything except him.

And as the evening wore on and Harry told him all about his life and the final battle and how injured he had been. He concluded his story by relating what Remus and Tonks had just finished telling their friends who were gathered back in Grimmauld Place.

Draco sat and listened and played with the cuffs that Harry had transfigured, wondering just why they made him feel so safe and treasured and he put off the time that he would have to reciprocate for as long as he could.

Then finally, screwing up his courage Draco told his story. He spoke carefully and slowly and once or twice he had to repeat things when Harry obviously did not understand.

He was not kind to himself. He told Harry how he had become a drug addict and a whore, how he had been beaten and raped on several occasions and how Ron had found him selling himself in Knockturn Alley and returned him to Hogwarts where he had struggled against the odds to build a new life. When he finished he was almost frightened to look at Harry and see the scorn and disgust that he was sure would be there.

But he steeled himself, screwed his eyes closed and then opening them met the eyes of the man that he loved beyond anything else. And Harry's eyes were filled with tears; he was on his feet and within the beat of a heart held Draco once again in his arms. Kissing him passionately as though he wanted to devour him.

“Libellule,” he whispered, “will you come to bed with me? Will you let me make love to you? Will you let me make you mine?” A sob caught in Draco's throat then and a single tear meandered down his cheek,

“Oh yes Harry,” he whispered, nodding to reinforce the message, so that there could be no doubt.
“Yes please.”

So Harry carried him up crooked stairs to a bedroom that was filled with evening light, the windows were open wide to let in a sweet summer zephyr, which set the curtains pirouetting like ballerinas in the gentle breeze. Then he was gently lowered onto a wrought iron bed that was dressed in crisp white linen and Chantilly lace, piled high with French pillows.

Harry looked at him as if he were the most precious thing that he had ever seen. He sat astride him pinning him to the mattress took Draco's face in his hands and bending down captured his lips with yet another firm, possessive kiss and Draco thought he might melt, dissolve with the pleasure of it.

Then painstakingly, slowly, as if he were more special to him than anything that he had ever known, Harry undressed him, removing each shabby garment with care, vanishing them where necessary, taking his time, caressing him, touching him, gazing upon him with wonder in his eyes. The only thing he did not remove were the cuffs and chain that he had fashioned and that Draco had almost forgotten he was wearing, these he draped over a wrought iron curlicue on the bedstead as he whispered. “Do not struggle, Libellule, I will make it all better.”

Finally Draco was completely naked, he felt like he were a present that had been unwrapped, the most precious gift that Harry had ever had or wanted or needed. Harry began to stroke his limbs, run his hands along them and as he did a warmth seemed to settle inside Draco, chasing away chills that he had not known were there. Along his chest, down each arm and over his stomach, kneeling beside Draco, intent on him and him alone, Harry ran his hands up and down Draco's body. Next his groin, now his legs, now his feet, now his toes and it was only when Harry returned to caressing Draco's left lower leg that he realised what he was doing. Slowly, lovingly, tenderly Harry was healing Draco, his dragonfly.

He was removing the needle marks, the scars and the bruises, mending the wounds of the last twelve years and taking away the pain and when he had finished Draco was bathed in light and wrapped in love. He was breathing gently, calmly, he felt safe and cared for and knew deep inside himself that Harry wanted him, and only him, forever, and at long last Draco Malfoy, broken beyond repair for so very long was finally healed.

"Oh Harry, Harry!" he breathed, "please take me, make love to me, make me yours." And finally after all that time, all those years and missed opportunities, the loss and the pain that both had suffered since they had first clung to each other in that cellar so long ago. After all the waiting, all the separation, Harry did.

He caressed him first, running his hands along Draco's newly healed skin, then he lowered his head to lick and suck Draco's nipples, his soft, velvety hair brushing Draco's cheek. As he nibbled his way down his lover's body Draco wriggled beneath him he wanted to touch his lover too, stroke his skin too and caress him in return, but Harry seemingly would have none of it.

Draco he seemed to have decided was going to feel nothing but pleasure, was going to be taken, possessed and there was nothing Harry's little dragonfly could do about it. So when Draco struggled weakly he nipped his ear with his strong white teeth and growled low in his throat, chuckling to himself, showing that he loved it when Draco squirmed.

Draco pleaded, begged and whimpered, before finally giving himself completely to pleasure, realising that Harry could not hear him, but doubting that he would be released even if Harry could somehow be made aware of his pleas.

Harry had reached his navel now and he darted his tongue in and out, nibbling at the rim, sucking hard at the skin below. He was leaving a little trail of love bites as his mouth continued its ministrations until, reaching Draco's cock he opened his mouth wide and damn near swallowed it whole.

This time Draco did scream long and loud, arching his back and tugging against his restraints. But Harry was not planning on releasing him any time soon that Draco could see. He was instead inserting a finger into Draco's anus and gently stroking the tight passage until he found what he was looking for, Draco's prostate. Which he continued to tease until Draco thought he would explode and came screaming into Harry's mouth.

Harry smiled at him then like the cat that had got the cream. He was licking his lips with obvious pleasure and manoeuvring himself so that he was poised to come inside his lover. This time he lifted Draco up so that he could reach his thighs, which he proceeded to continue licking and nibbling.

Draco continued to beg and squirm and scream he had never felt pleasure like this before. If he did not know his inner thighs were so sensitive, how in the fuck did Harry? But then all coherent thought was driven from him as Harry bit him, not breaking the skin, just marking him, telling the

world to whom he belonged.

Draco's brains felt like they had turned to mush when all at once Harry was inside him, filling him, fucking him hard. Draco's eyes, flooded with tears of pleasure and made blurry by lust looked up at his lover to see that Harry too was lost to desire, eyes closed, mouth slightly parted, cheeks pink with the effort of the hard fucking, and Draco thought he had never seen anything so beautiful in his life.

Still Harry continued keeping up the punishing rhythm, filling his emptiness, pounding into him with what seemed almost like desperation, as if he wanted all of him to be inside Draco along with his cock. Then Harry's bright green eyes sprang open and looked at his lover with such desire, such possessiveness that Draco was undone. And he came screaming for the second time, this time synchronizing his orgasm with Harry's.

Harry had finally dissolved the chain that held him to the bedstead but left the cuffs on Draco's wrists much to Draco's delight. "That is to show the world that you are mine," he growled possessively in Draco's ear, and then, with slight concern. "You are okay with that?"

And all Draco would do was nod shakily, with tears of joy pricking at the corners of his eyes. Later they showered together, and for the first time in many years Draco was not ashamed of his body.

The scars had vanished; the needle tracks, the cuts from where Draco had gone through a period of self-harm. But more than that, than all of that, Draco's leg was no longer damaged or twisted, it was straight and strong and true. He could walk as well as any man, but he knew he would not object if Harry decided to carry him sometimes he thought with a secret smile.

In fact the only marks left anywhere on his body now were the bite marks and love bites left by Harry in his passion and these would be gone all too quickly. But then he supposed Harry could refresh them at any time he wanted, and he realised with a thrill that Harry would probably want to do just that.

He found his hands running over Harry's body, as they stood under the powerful jets of water, he reached for the soap and rubbing it to a lather he put it aside and started to massage the broad strong back of the man beside him.

Moving round he ran his hands over the firm muscles, the hard flat stomach, he dropped to his knees and this time he sucked Harry's hard cock into his mouth, delighting in the scream that he managed to coax, now that it was his turn to take charge. But once Harry had come screaming to Draco's ministrations he grabbed him up and carried a naked squirming, dripping wet Malfoy to the bed, where he fucked him all over again.

Finally, when neither of them had any energy left for sex, Draco laid himself half on top of Harry and taking his face in his hands once more, said.

"Tell me about your memories Harry, tell me *how* you remembered. Why did you come for me?"

So as they lay curled together, relaxed and sleepy, Harry told Draco the story that until now no one else had known but him.

"Voldemort was attacking my mind, destroying my memories, and not just destroying them but distorting them, raping them as they.....as they raped my body. But this was worse. The things that they had done to me, he projected, inserted them into my memories of Ron, Hermione the others and I could not, would not let him do that to you. If he had you Draco, if he had gotten to you, even in my mind, it would have destroyed me. But I did not know how to stop him, I

couldn't stop him. He was so powerful, so vicious.

I had had some training from Severus, but." Here Harry hung his head, "It did not work out, I did not try and that....that is why Sirius died too." There were tears in Harry's eyes now and Draco longed to kiss them away, but Harry was still speaking and he did not want to distract his lover so he lay his head on Harry's shoulder and listened.

"I did not know how to Occlude and I was trying to keep him out. I was throwing memories at him, hurling them, retreating, hiding you as best I could but all the time he was coming closer. And then I thought of the story that you used to tell me, the one about the sleeping princess and I thought of the barrier of thorns and the castle and I knew what I had to do, but I also knew he could see what I was thinking so I switched to French.

"I started to sing in my mind, over and over.

"Frere Jacques, Frere Jacques, dormez vous, dormez vous, sonnez les matines, sonnez les matines, ding, dang, dong, ding, dang, dong.

"It was childish, preposterous, to sing a children's song, whilst my mind was being attacked by a dark lord. But it confused him and he stopped, just for a second, he was perplexed and behind the song I built a castle. A huge castle with turrets and flags, and battlements and inside I put you and Hermione and Ron and everyone I cared about that still was left, and all around it I wove a hedge, a thicket, of thorn and briar rose, hawthorn and bramble. And when it was finished the hedge was thick and impenetrable and he could not pass through and all the time I thought, "rappelle-toi ta Libellule, N'oublie-pas ta Libellule." *Remember your dragonfly, do not forget your dragonfly* and I knew that you were safe.

"Voldemort didn't destroy my memories, I hid them, I hid you all.

"What I did not realise was that I had woven a spell I was too young, too inexperienced to know what I had done. But I did know that after the battle I would find you and the magic would be broken, just like in the story Draco, broken with the kiss of my one true love. *My Prince*. But then I did not find you. I did not even know where to look for you, or even what I was looking for all I knew was that you were lost.

For years I got flashes, glimpses of faces, of voices. But they always danced out of reach. Mhairi did look extraordinarily like you, you know, but you are very different people. I think that maybe when I first fell in love it was because she felt familiar, then I loved her for herself and her face was not overlaid with yours anymore. But you were always there somewhere Draco, like an echo of a memory.

Because I was repeating "remember your dragonfly" to myself time and time again, I did remember it, I did not know what it was, or why I needed to find my Libellule, I just had this compulsion to find it, to keep searching until I did. And because of the song, because I was using French to distract Voldemort, I remembered French too. In fact Remus told me that the first words I spoke were in French.

My mind left clues you see, I left clues, I just did not have enough information to decipher them."

And Draco was sobbing now, openly, brokenly as if his heart would be rend in two. So Harry took his lover into his arms and shushed his tears, and stroked his hair just like he had from his cage all those years ago,

"Hush little dragonfly, don't cry. Its okay now, all okay. You woke me up with your kiss my sweet, brave prince. I have found you and you are never, never" (this said quite savagely through

clenched teeth) “leaving me again.”

But Draco’s heart ached for the boy that Harry had been, desperately trying to protect the things, the people that he loved, from the murderous onslaught of a monster.

How was he to know that the spell he had woven was so strong that it would not dissolve on its own, that it would wait twelve long years for him to find his Dragonfly?

Cruel wicked fate that had kept them apart for so long, for so many years, when just a moment together would have been enough.

Then Draco remembered, Flora and how she had brought them together, how he had made his way to Harry’s bed, thinking him badly injured. Not knowing that Harry had searched for him even though he did not really understand what he was searching for. And how he had been unable to resist leaning over and placing a kiss on his lover’s lips. Once again the words that he had said to Harry so long ago played in his head

“The Prince stood gazing at his princess at her golden locks and the long silvery lashes that curled on her blushing cheeks and the Prince could not help himself, so he leaned forward and gently placed a kiss on curved, crimson lips, and as he did she drew a breath and opened eyes that filled with love and the magic that had bound them all was destroyed because the bravery and love of one man had set them free and they would never again be enslaved. And they all lived happily ever after”

The locks were raven, not golden, the lashes coal black not silver and the princess was another prince. But Harry had used his story this fairytale and woven magic that had ultimately led to the destruction of the most evil wizard who ever lived.

Harry was sleeping now, his breathing was even and his eyes closed, but he had his arm wrapped firmly around Draco, holding him tight, and Draco knew that he was finally where he had wanted to be for a very long time in the bed, in the arms of the man he loved.

Draco remembered those precious four days that they had together in every detail for the rest of his life; in all his long, long life there were indeed many such memories, but those days, those precious days were the ones that healed him.

He woke the next morning to Harry’s kisses, the morning sun was streaming in the window and he gazed up into verdant bright green eyes, beautiful bright green eyes. Harry was speaking, but whatever he said was lost to Draco as the suddenly sound of church bells drowned out the morning birdsong. But Harry didn’t seem to notice, so Draco covered his ears and did a mock Quasimodo routine, mouthing “the bells, the bells!!” and rolling his eyes. Harry looked puzzled for a second and then laughed, he turned to Draco and started speaking rapidly and just for a second Draco felt like had been bathed in ice. This must be what it was like for Harry, all the time, seeing lips moving but not understanding what was being said.

But Draco’s dismay must have shown on his face because Harry had strode back across the room grabbed him in his arms and was kissing him passionately, then the church bells stopped and the ringing Draco’s ears seemed to carry on but whether it was from the bells or from Harry’s kisses it was hard to tell.

“I wanted to wake you first,” Harry said. “I forgot to warn you about the bells yesterday, everyone says they terrify the life out of them unless they are warned in advance!” Then with his head on one side, “Why so sad Libellule?”

“Your hearing Harry,” Draco said with a sob, “your poor ears!”

But Harry was still smiling, “don’t worry, Dragonfly, I’m fine. I got used to it a very long time ago. I have my family, my health, my magic and now.” He smiled down at Draco, “Now I have you too,”

And once again he was kissing his lover, only this time he had tangled his hand in Draco’s hair and was claiming his mouth, desperately, passionately and Draco didn’t think about anything for a while.

But later, after they had made love and showered, and Harry had carried him back to bed and kissed him some more, he did think about it. This was how Harry got through life, how he had dealt with the terrible things that had happened to him, he tried to see things in a positive light, it was almost, what was the name of that wretched book...? Oh yes *Pollyannaish* the way he seemed to act sometimes.

But Draco knew that there was an awful lot more to Harry than groundless optimism. Harry truly did see himself as blessed, he did not feel that his loss of hearing had stopped him from doing any of the things that he liked to do so he dismissed it as “can’t be helped” and just got on with life. In fact sometimes he even seemed to make a virtue of his disability.

Now was a case in point. He had suggested that Draco might like to stay in bed because he was going to go to the nearest village on this battered old bicycle that he had once found in the shed and get them fresh croissants and bread, and off he had bounded, because he definitely did *boundsometimes*, so Draco had gotten up and trailed after him wrapped only in a sheet to see this famous bicycle and then fallen about laughing at the ramshackle piece of junk that Harry was brandishing.

“Aha, blaggard!” Harry shouted, “you will be sorry when I return with the goods!” And he clambered aboard the strange contraption and peddled off in a wobbly fashion.

Draco had gone back to bed then, smiling to himself contentedly and he must have fallen asleep again because this time when he woke, he was laying propped on pillows and tied spread-eagled and Harry was sitting astride him waving a razor and wearing an evil grin and very little else. “I fancy breakfast my love,” Harry growled, “and you are a little....hairy! But I suggest you stay still as I am not very good with this.”

Draco screamed as Harry covered his nether regions with thick foamy cream and started to shave. Ten minutes and quick scourgify later Draco’s cock and balls were completely hairless and Harry had proceeded to feed him warm milky coffee and crumbly honey covered croissants before dribbling more honey over his chest and nipples and down past his navel until he reached Draco’s cock which was soon slathered with even more of the sticky stuff. Then he sat back to admire his handy work for a moment or two.

All the time that Harry had been busy Draco had been screaming and pleading and Harry had completely ignored him by the simple expedient of not looking at him. He had just hummed tunelessly to himself as he worked and occasionally stroked various parts of Draco’s anatomy comfortingly as he futilely tried to struggle

“You do look beautiful my love!” Harry said smugly. “I am quite hungry now after all that exercise, I think I should eat!” And with that he spent the next wee while licking and sucking at Draco’s chest and nipples until he was literally begging for Harry to come inside him. But Harry just carried on grinning evilly and licking and nibbling his way down Draco’s body until he reached his lover’s engorged cock, which he also covered in honey and then devoured it as if it were a lollipop.

Draco came, harder than he had in his entire life, and then he had been pulled down the bed, released from his ankle restraints and found Harry inside him deeper than he had thought possible, minutes later he was screamingly hard again as Harry pounded against his prostate.

Afterwards when Harry released him from his restraints he had grabbed his lover's face in both his hands again and said

"Harry James Potter you are one kinky git!"

"I know," Harry said, "but I am *your* kinky git and I love you with all my heart."

And the tiny bit of Draco that was annoyed with Harry melted and instead of shouting he kissed him instead.

In the days to come Draco glorified in his new physical strength. They swam in the pool in the garden he and Harry. Draco walked wherever he could, delighting in his uninjured leg. Harry even conjured up another bicycle and taught Draco to ride it, insisting on soothing his bruises each night. And they talked and talked, about men that had been in Draco's life and about Mhairi.

Harry had told him that it had taken him several years to fall for Mhairi, and that it had not really been until Rory had been born that he had truly fallen in love with his wife.

"Well how did you get Flora then?" Draco had said, and at the old fashioned look that Harry gave him. "Well I know how, I just don't know how come!"

"I was a seventeen year old boy Draco! And Mhairi was very determined, and before I knew it I was a dad – not that I am complaining though! I love my kids and I would never be without them."

Then Harry told him all about his children and their little quirks and foibles. How Flora was forever creating little arrangements of flowers and stones and shells, that he would stumble upon, which she never wanted to show off she just liked making them. How Rory had a toy dog that he carried everywhere called Giles. How he was sure the twins were Slytherin so quickly did they wrap everyone round their fingers. And how he knew that sweet little Finn was a Hufflepuff.

On the final afternoon, Harry procured some brooms and for the first time in twelve years they flew against each other and Draco revelled in the freedom that flying gave him. The wind blowing in his hair, chasing each other playfully, soaring over the orchard, which was of course where they finally ended up making love under the trees.

Finally, finally, after a short Parisian shopping trip, it was time to go home.

They stood in front of Grimmauld Place hand in hand and Draco felt nervous for the first time. What if the children hated him now? What if everyone turned away? But Harry seemed to sense his anxieties, because he held him close and together they walked in through the front door to meet their future together.

Severus was in the sitting room when Harry and Draco came home at last; Hermione rushed out of the kitchen with Ron at the sound of the door and the children exploded from nowhere.

"Harry," Hermione said, "Draco. You are home,"

She went forward to embrace them both as Severus watched. But Harry forestalled her. He grabbed Hermione and swung her round and then laughingly turned to Ron.

“I remember you, I remember! Draco healed me he made me well again. And I remember it all!”

Then Harry danced around the hallway embracing Hermione in a clumsy waltz,

“Hats, for house-elves, SPEW, the Yule Ball - you were so beautiful Hermione! A little girl on the train looking for someone else’s lost toad! Crookshanks, scraggy old cat!” Then he pulled her even closer and kissed her leaving her eyes wide and filled with tears and her chest heaving for breath, for lack of air, and from trying not to laugh.

Because now Harry was waltzing with Ron and shouting. “Quidditch! Chess! de-gnoming the garden at The Burrow! The Chudley Cannons Forever! Fred and George.” And then he was kissing Ron too, and the children were shouting and laughing and bouncing up and down, all looking very like Harry in their exuberance just then.

And then Harry shushed them and pulled Draco from the shadows and the children all gasped in unison.

“Legolas!” Said Flora. “You look so beautiful!”

And Severus had to agree with her, for Draco truly did look beautiful.

Gone was the broken, damaged man of a few days ago, the one they had all come to know, gone was the abused boy that Severus had tried to protect, gone was the arrogant Malfoy heir.

This Draco was clad in a close cut silver robe, which fitted his torso and flared over his slim hips, he wore matching trousers which were tucked into soft leather boots and he stood straight and tall. His white blonde hair shone, in a river of pale gold running over his shoulders and down his back.

His eyes were calm and serene and he walked steadily towards the children without stumbling, without limping. And then he smiled, a huge beaming smile that lit up his face and made his eyes sparkle and dance, glistening with silver, expressing pure joy.

He walked over to Flora and knelt down to look her in the eyes and said in a voice that was steady and strong and unafraid. “Thank you, Flora, thank you for everything!”

And then she was crying and the other children were dancing around singing about how Daddy had brought home their elf. And the old house that had so long been dark and gloomy and home to hatred and despair rang with joy and music and light.

Part Nine

PART NINE – BUILDING THE WORLD ANEW

Severus was cross. He stood at his window and looked out over the castle grounds thinking about the last twelve months. He remembered how despairing they had all been at the Memorial Service last year. How despairing *he* had been. Scrimgeour and Umbridge had held the magical world in thrall. Banished anyone who did not agree with them or whom they did not like. Everywhere there had been a feeling of fear, of menace. But what a difference a year had made, what a difference *Harry* had made. And today rather than a mere one hundred and fifty people gathered in The Great Hall there were in fact several thousand waiting downstairs to remember the fallen.

Severus scowled down at the Order of Merlin First Class that was pinned to his chest and remembered the day in the spring when it had been awarded to him. “What a piece of nonsense!” He thought to himself grumpily. Hermione would be here in a minute and they would walk down together to the ceremony as they always did, as he stood there wrapped in thought he wondered whether that was a spot on his medal, and gave it a surreptitious polish with his sleeve, jumping suddenly when there was a knock on the door.

Hermione came in after a moment and she smiled kindly at him. “Severus it is time for the ceremony,” she said. Severus stood and sighed, he moved over to the rather beautiful young woman that she had matured into, especially now that her abdomen swelled with the child that she was expecting in two month’s time. There was no doubt that she would be a good mother. She was wonderful with his great nieces and nephews and they all adored her. He inclined his head towards her as a gesture of respect, just as he always did and tucked his arm around her’s. Together they set off for the Great Hall, walking slowly; they made their way downstairs, each of them lost in their own thoughts.

Because of the sheer numbers of wizards attending this year, special seating that echoed the raised rows of the Wizengamot had been magically constructed. This meant that everyone could see the enlarged memorial, even if they would be standing for the actual ceremony itself

There was space left for them beside Ron at the front of the crowd, and a special chair had been set-aside for Hermione. Severus was glad to be holding her arm because it gave him something else to concentrate on, other than the sporadic applause that he seemed to generate wherever he went these days. He was a hero, everyone said so, and Severus wished that just a few of those people who had grabbed him over the past few months and told him how wonderful he was and how they had known all along that he was innocent had been a bit more evident in all the previous years since the war.

The memorial was still there as black and unfathomable as it had always been, only now it had grown. Sometime in the last few nights it had gradually increased in size and many, many more names had been added. No one seemed to know how or why this had happened, and there was a certain nervousness about this strange phenomenon. But none the less, it had not stopped people coming from far and wide. Whether that was to mourn those who had been lost in all the wizarding wars or whether to catch a glimpse of the magical world’s golden couple Severus could not say for certain, though he had his suspicions.

Everyone was here today, the great and the good, familiar faces and strangers. Hagrid had come back for the ceremony and he stood to one side, he and his wife were too big for the seating. It was unlikely that he and Olympe would come back to Britain as they now ran a Centaur sanctuary

in the Camargue. But he had promised to be here today to play for the memorial and of course he did not want to turn down a chance of seeing his godchildren Calum and Caitriona. Remus and Tonks sat holding hands as much in love as ever. This was the first Memorial Service that any of these four brave individuals who had done so much in the war against Voldemort had been able to attend, hounded from the UK shores as they had been.

Severus then noticed Andromeda, sitting beside her daughter, looking beautiful and proud, the last of the Noble House of Black. She was busy and celebrated these days since it had been made public that she invented the potion that cured Lycanthropy, but she like Severus was far too experienced to let fame so late in life go to her head, she caught his eye and smiled at him.

The Weasleys were here too supporting Bill; he had remained as Minister by popular demand, he was honest and fair and was doing his best to slowly introduce much needed change to the magical community. Bill's reforms included total equality for all magical creatures. Except for house-elves who could now choose if they wished freedom, Bill's wife Fleur ran a support network, which offered aid and support to those house-elves that did wish to be free. It was early days yet; but there was a general hope that in future all elves would enjoy the same freedoms as other magical creatures.

Fleur was supported and advised by Draco, who was using his not inconsiderable charm to tour the country talking to elf factions supported by Harry's rather eccentric friend Dobby and another elf named Winky who ran "House-Elves Anonymous" for those who wished to seek freedom but who did not quite know how to go about it, talking about her own experiences to those who were interested.

Finally the doors opened once more and in came Harry, Draco and the children. The murmur of the crowd grew louder as everyone noticed their arrival but the solemnity of the occasion was such that people seemed reluctant to call out or cheer, but Severus suspected it was a close run thing.

Draco was holding Finn's hand but as soon as he saw Severus the little boy tore away from his second father and came running to him, clambering into his lap and plugging in his thumb as he reached the strong safety of his great uncle.

Over the past year Severus had come to know happiness unlike any that he had ever believed possible for him. Harry and Draco had taken him into their family, and it was their family, because after a few months of shyness and tentativeness, Draco had simply blossomed. He had lost the insecurity that had marked the eighteen months before Harry's return, and had taken up his directorship of the Lenoir Foundation, which he handled with gusto and aplomb, along with his work with the elves.

Hermione had indeed helped Harry's hearing too, she had arranged for Harry to have a cochlear implant, which had been specially modified so that it did not react to magic. It did not give Harry anything like perfect hearing but it did enable him to distinguish some sounds. Harry said it was like being at the bottom of a swimming pool, sounds were distant and distorted. Severus suspected that Harry often turned it off, as it seemed to annoy him at times. But at least he could hear his children's voices and he could use it on occasions like today.

Hermione had followed the cochlear implant by coming up with an ingenious spell that allowed Harry to see the words that people had spoken written in the air beside them. This seemed to suit him better. The children had thought this hilarious until Hermione adjusted it so that Harry alone could see the words through a special adaptation to his glasses. Nevertheless Severus had felt a bit chilled when Harry told him that the first time he had ever seen words written in the air like that was when Voldemort had used them in the Chamber of Secrets, when he had been just thirteen.

Coming into the hall with Harry and Draco were Fi and Iona, the latter moved swiftly over to sit beside him. She slipped her hand, with its emerald engagement ring proudly displayed through his arm and turned to smile at him, lovingly.

Finally the ceremony was ready to start.

Minerva McGonagall, moved forward and cast *Sonorous* in order to read aloud the words carved into the stone. Just as she had every year for the last twelve.

*For all those we have lost, or who have gone before,
We will hold you in our hearts forever more.*

But she had scarcely finished reading when the room suddenly grew very, very cold. The doors that had been wide open slammed and sealed themselves shut. There were gasps from some of the members of the crowd and even Severus felt a little unsettled. Minerva paused in her reading surprised, but other than a little comforting squeeze of the children's hands Harry and Draco did not react at all.

Once more the temperature dropped and the gasps turned to mutterings until of a sudden in front of the crowd a silvery mist began to appear. The mist rapidly grew and changed shape, appearing to solidify, to enlarge, until there in the Great Hall of Hogwarts School, standing before them was the ghost of Albus Dumbledore.

"Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, Minerva, I hope you don't mind the intrusion?" He said, his words echoing around the otherwise silent hall. He was smiling at them all, benevolently. But even Albus, great wizard as he had been, could not make a ghost's eyes twinkle. Minerva, stunned at the unexpected appearance of the ex-headmaster, mutely shook her head.

"How good to see you all here today, to remember the fallen, to remember the dead," he paused here and looked around at the audience who sat rooted to their seats, unable to move or to make a sound.

"Once every few millennia a gift is given to we who have gone before, we can choose to come back to complete unfinished business, well I stand before you today to complete mine. I come with a warning....and with a thank you.

"The warning is for all of you.

"I had thought after the terror that was Grindelwald, there would be no more hatred. But twice in my lifetime the wizarding world was ripped apart by hideous war. Twice, hatred and prejudice dominated our world and took lives before their time. Destroyed families, killed children. And once more, after I was already dead, that hatred took over government and worked in a much more insidious way, to destroy us from within.

"These causes were promoted by hatred and supported by evil, but also my friends they were supported by you. Those of you who stood by and let that evil happen, you too bear responsibility; you too have blood on your hands.

"There are those among you today who have returned to mourn for the first time as those who should have supported you expelled them and chased them away. And beside them stand those who let our heroes be chased away and lifted not a finger to help them or a voice to call themselves friend. Hatred for the other, for those who are not like us, should have no place in *our* world.

"We are not many, we who have magic, and we should nurture each other and care for our

neighbours and family and friends. This time last year my friends we stood on the brink of destruction, for without our magical creatures, how long before magic leaves the world? Without our Muggleborn children how do we keep our magic fresh? Without our noble families how do we secure those traditions that are good and strong?

“That we stand here today is largely due to the efforts, of one man and a small group of his supporters and friends who saved our world. Once against the overt danger of an evil wizard and once more against the more sinister danger of secret hate.”

The shade of the wizard turned to Harry and Draco.

“Mr Potter, for giving up your childhood to fight a war.

“We thank you!

“For enduring torture beyond our imagining.

“We thank you!

“And for standing against prejudice where ever you find it and always striving to do what is right

“We thank you once again.”

Albus Dumbledore bowed low before Harry and before Draco, both of whose eyes shone with tears and then he straightened up and began to read the list of names that were carved into the obsidian plaque.

Only this time the list of names was far longer than before and included all of those who had died in the name of prejudice, in several wars. As their names were called, as if summoned, those long dead or lost, appeared before them in ghostly form. They came forward to bow to Harry or to wave and nod to family members before turning towards the great doors that barred the entrance and fading away like morning mist.

One after another they came, mostly silent, in a seemingly unending macabre parade. There was hardly a sound in the hall, just the soft sobbing of myriad members of the crowd, and the muffled weeping of Rubeus Hagrid. On and on marched the stream of spirits, until finally, two laughing men appeared together, eliciting a howl from Molly as Dumbledore continued to read out names....., “ “*Gideon Prewitt, Fabien Prewitt*,” the two men were waving madly at their, sister looking for all the world like older versions of Fred and George....., ”*Sirius Black, Regulus Black*,” Two more brothers, arm in arm on the same side at last. They stopped and saluted Harry somewhat irreverently before Sirius said,

“Take care of yourself pup, you did good you know,” and then he moved off before stopping in front of Remus and saying in a voice that seemed to echo from beyond forever. “Look after the next generation of Marauders for me Moony, teach them all we knew.” Then he threw his arm around his brother and disappeared as Albus continued to read

”, *Amelia Bones, Florean Fortescue, Octavius Ollivander, Emmeline Vance, Bertha Jorkins*.....

Cedric Diggory,” A smiling handsome boy, who had died for no reason and had been forgotten by all except a loving father. A man who still kept his memory alive and stood watching with tears rolling down his cheeks as his son took part in the sombre parade. “*Oliver Wood*” the old Gryffindor captain appeared with a huge grin on his face and saluted his former seeker for the final time,.....

. “*Filius Flitwick, Rolanda Hooch, Gregory Goyle, Patricia Finnegan,..... Alastor Moody*”

Clumping by holding on to his trademark wooden leg, even in death..., "Percy Weasley" ... redeemed to his family at last, he was smiling and waving at them as he passed....., "Angelina Johnson, Terry Boot, Margaret Boot, Dennis Creevey, Rachael Morrison, Zachary Smith, Lucinda Smith, Malcolm Smith, Daphne Greengrass, Lavinia Greengrass, Geraldine Clearwater, Dedalus Diggle,....."

"James Potter, Lily Potter" Who stopped for only a moment, and looked at their son with such love in their eyes that even Severus was undone. Fat tears rolled unchecked down his cheeks as he watched the interaction. "We are so proud of you my son!" James said quietly. Severus, looking on, marvelled at how young he was, this erstwhile enemy. In truth he was merely just another boy who had died too soon, desperately trying to protect his family. And all at once Severus felt the long standing hatred of this man, who barely was a man, disintegrate like the ghosts had been doing at the end of the parade.

Lily had stopped now, and she was staring hungrily at Harry and his children as if she would like to gather them in her arms and hold them forever. "We love you our Harry our darling child," she murmured, before turning to bestow just one smile on the brother she had not known as such in life then following the others out of site of the mortal throng

Narcissa Malfoy, Who also stopped, just for a moment, "We are so proud of you Draco." She said, reaching out a ghostly hand to brush gently across his cheek a light, cold, feathery touch.

Then finally *Lucius Malfoy* came forward as his name was called

He stood before Draco gazing upon him with eyes that seemed to burn with pride that was inside him.

"I love you Draco." He said. "Live well and be happy my son. You are indeed the last and the best of the Malfoys." He bowed down before his only child his face filled with love and respect.

Then he and Narcissa turned towards the door, just as the others had and faded slowly away.

The march of the fallen had seemed to take forever and yet take no time at all.

Lucius Malfoy it seemed was the final participant, because no more appeared and as the ghosts finally vanished from sight Dumbledore came forward one last time, stood before Harry and bowed deeply once more.

"Thank you my boy." He said with infinite sadness. "Thank you from the very bottom of my heart. I wish I could have spared you the hardship that you had to suffer, have given you the childhood that you should have had. But you came though it all, my boy, so well, so bravely. I am proud to have known you Harry Potter." Then with a quick wink at Draco he smiled that twinkly smile of his for the last time and then slowly disappeared

For a moment nothing happened, everyone one was still and then Hagrid came forward as had been arranged; and with tears still rolling down his cheeks he put a battered old bugle to his lips, and slowly, sweetly, putting all the effort and love that he could draw upon into the music he began to play the haunting tune of *The Last Post*

The hairs on the back of Severus' neck stood up and he shivered as the last notes of the beautiful, time honoured melody echoing in the hall, faded away.

The hall was completely silent, even the weeping had stopped, as each and every person there stood still and quiet, each one wrapped in their own memories. Severus was sure that nobody who had attended this ceremony and witnessed this scene would ever forget what had transpired today,

and maybe; just maybe it would make a difference

Finally at the end of it all, Minerva read aloud the words of the Muggle poem still carved starkly and plainly: into the stone, just as she did every year in her rich Scottish accent, at a measured pace that was unbelievably moving. As if they had not already been moved beyond imagining.

For The Fallen

*They shall not grow old, as we who are left grow old:
Age shall not weary, them, nor the years condemn
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them**

Epilogue

Draco was striding across the hillside; he was much better at walking than Harry was. Harry wanted to run everywhere, but Draco had the patience to relax and enjoy the sharp clear air of a Highland September. Plus his long, lithe legs strode ahead and made short work of the bumpy ground and tangled heather bushes. They had decided not to do a hill walk today; they were just going for a hike, him and Harry alone together.

He reached the stream that was their destination long before Harry did, and threw himself down on a grass covered bank so that he could observe his lover's progress in peace

Harry was beautiful. So very beautiful and there was not a day went by that Draco did not thank his good fortune that Harry was his, for always. He smiled to himself though as he saw that Harry was just a tiny bit tender today. They had just come back from their visit to France; four days that Draco was sure would become an annual treat. They had gone a bit later this year, once the children had returned to school, Gryffindor Rory now joining his Ravenclaw sister Flora.

This time Harry had bought them both shiny new bicycles, which he insisted they rode around the quiet roads of the green, open countryside in which they were staying. They spent many happy hours exploring and travelling like Muggles. Draco had loved it, now that his injuries were healed he had fully returned to his natural grace. He would never again take his gracefulness for granted, he revelled in it. Harry would never have such grace, he was fast and he was brave, and when he flew! When he flew it was like poetry in the air. But there was too much of the gangly puppy about Harry for him to ever be truly graceful, so Draco knew he would have to settle for magnificent instead.

He saw Harry's features clearly now that he had closed the distance between them. He watched his lover clambering over a large rock in order that he might scramble up to join Draco. The sunlight caught all of a sudden on the matching cuffs that Harry wore to complement Draco's. It had taken Draco a year, but this time *he* had tied *Harry* to the bed and removed his body hair in order to indulge in a little snack. But Draco had never had a sweet tooth so it was not his fault if there had been some acidic preservatives in Draco's favourite spread, which perhaps stung the tender area of Harry's cock and balls. He had licked it off as fast as he could, thrilling in the sound of Harry's screams as he writhed beneath him.

That was Harry's weakness really, he was more Slytherin than any other Gryffindor that Draco had ever met, but he was still a Gryffindor and he had such a kind heart. He might like to play games, but that is all they were all they ever were and Draco would only need to look a bit sad or shed a tear and Harry would stop whatever he was doing, all concerned and tend to his lover. Draco should have no such problem ultra Slytherin as he was, he should take advantage of

Harry's soft heart, but he found that he must have some Gryffindor in him too because when it came to Harry, Draco's heart was as soft as butter.

Harry reached him finally, "Hiya," he smiled as he threw himself down beside Draco and leaned over for a kiss. Draco let him claim his kiss and then pushed him off as he unpacked their picnic.

He thought back to the Memorial Day and to Dumbledore's appearance. He still had not quite got over that day, but neither as far as he could see, had anyone else. The old headmaster had been right, and everyone knew it. They surely had been on the brink of disaster, of annihilation. It would have taken a few more years but in a generation at most, the world that they knew would have been destroyed, lost to prejudice and hate.

He thought warmly of his parents who seemed happy and united in death as they had not been in life, and he thought with a certain tenderness of Lucius, his arrogant father who had tried to mould Draco into a mirror image of himself but seemed prouder of him as he was.

It had only been a month but everyone was trying. Bill Weasley as Minister for Magic was continuing to push for reform. It was no longer acceptable to use casual racism against other magical folk, or against Muggles for that matter. Draco was too shrewd to believe that prejudice could ever be completely eradicated from any society. But if enough people stood up against it then at the very least it made those opinions distasteful, shameful, something people kept to themselves.

That could only mean a better world for the children when they grew up. And they were such lovely children, Harry's children. His children too now since the formal adoption. They had welcomed their "elf" into the family without a single qualm it seemed. They were quite proud in fact of finding him for their daddy. They had welcomed Severus too.

Severus Snape had perhaps changed more than anyone apart from himself over the last year; Draco thought it was a strange thing to see Severus happy. He had joined their family and was almost always at their house, being sequestered by the children to read stories, or spending time with the vivacious Iona, who teased him out of his grumpiness and pricked his pomposity when it reared its head. He and Harry had really become quite fond of each other in a rather tentative way. Severus would maybe always feel a certain coolness towards James Potter's son, but Harry with his giving nature had embraced into his family him anyway.

Dumbledore had praised Harry's heroism for rescuing the world but Draco knew that he had rescued a number of individuals too. Remus and Tonks, Hagrid, Severus and of course Draco himself. If Harry had not returned when he did, Draco would have been lost to madness; the long slow descent had been nearly complete. Draco knew that the abyss would always be waiting for him, but Harry kept the demons away and held him tight when he woke screaming from nightmares, drenched in sweat, thrashing and crying. But he helped Harry too, Harry had dreams, how could he not after what he had been through? And then it was Draco's turn to hold and soothe him. But right now on this splendid autumn day Harry was speaking so he pulled himself away from his thoughts and looked instead at the man who was his lover.

Harry smiled at him, those glorious green eyes dancing with joy opening his mouth to say something, but just then in the corner of his vision something caught his attention and Draco turned to see a huge pair of Blue Hawk dragonflies, dancing by in the light airs of this glorious day. Harry followed his gaze, and smiling tenderly at his lover said

"It's been a good year for dragonflies hasn't it Libellule?"

And Draco, grinning smugly had to agree that it certainly had.

Fin

A/N - This is truly the end, I hope you enjoyed it, thanks for all your lovely reviews and thank you for sharing my story with me. Luciexx

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